

TEN THOUSAND A YEAR

BY SAMUEL WARREN D.C.L.
AUTHOR OF "DIARY OF A LATE PHYSICIAN"



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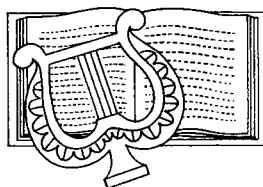
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TEN THOUSAND A-YEAR.

BY

SAMUEL WARREN, D.C.L.,

AUTHOR OF

"PASSAGES FROM THE DIARY OF A LATE PHYSICIAN," ETC.



WARD, LOCK, AND CO.,

LONDON: WARWICK HOUSE, SALISBURY SQUARE, E.C.;

NEW YORK: BOND STREET,

PREFACE.

THE Author of this work begs gratefully to express his conviction that no small share of any success which it may have met with, is attributable to the circumstance of its having had the advantage of an introduction to the public through the medium of *Blackwood's Magazine*—a distinguished periodical, to which he feels it an honour to have been, for a time, a contributor.

One word, only, he ventures to offer, with reference to the general character and tendency of "TEN THOUSAND A-YEAR." He has occasionally observed it spoken of as merely a "comic," "an amusing and laughable" story ; but he cannot help thinking that no one will so characterize it, who may take the trouble of reading it throughout, and be capable of comprehending its scope and object. Whatever may be its defects of execution it has been written in a grave and earnest spirit ; with no attempt whatever to render it acceptable to *mere* novel-readers ; but with a steadfast view to that development and illustration, whether humorously or otherwise, of principles, of character, and of conduct, which the author had proposed to himself from the first, in the hope that he might secure the approbation of persons of sober, independent, and experienced judgment. }

Literature is not the author's profession. Having been led, by special circumstances only, to commence writing this work, he found it impossible to go on, without sacrificing to it a large portion of the time usually allotted to repose, at some little cost both of health and spirits. This was, however, indispensable, in order to prevent its interference with his professional avocations. It has been written, also, under certain other considerable disadvantages—which may account for several imperfections in it during its original appearance. The periodical interval of leisure which his profession allows him, has enabled the author, however, to give that complete revision

to the whole which may render it worthier of the public favour. He is greatly gratified by the reception which it has already met with, both at home and abroad ; and, in taking a final and a reluctant leave of the public, ventures to express a hope that this work may prove to be an addition, however small and humble, to the stock of healthy English literature.

London, October, 1841.

* * For the beautiful verses entitled "PEACE," (at page 111.) the author is indebted to a friend.

TEN THOUSAND A-YEAR.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT ten o'clock one Sunday morning, in the month of July 18—, the dazzling sunbeams which had for several hours irradiated a little dismal back attic in one of the closest courts adjoining Oxford Street, in London, and stimulated with their intensity the closed eyelids of a young man lying in bed, at length awoke him. He rubbed his eyes for some time, to relieve himself from the irritation occasioned by the sudden glare they encountered; and yawned and stretched his limbs with a heavy sense of weariness, as though his sleep had not refreshed him. He presently cast his eyes on the heap of clothes lying huddled together on the backless chair by the bedside, and where he had hastily flung them about an hour after midnight; at which time he had returned from a great draper's shop in Oxford Street, where he served as a shopman, and where he had nearly dropped asleep after a long day's work, in the act of putting up the shutters. He could hardly keep his eyes open while he undressed, short as was the time required to do so; and on dropping exhausted into bed, there he had continued in deep unbroken slumber, till the moment at which he is presented to the reader. He lay for several minutes, stretching, yawning, and sighing, occasionally casting an irresolute glance towards the tiny fireplace, where lay a modicum of wood and coal, with a tinder-box and a match or two placed upon the hob, so that he could easily light his fire for the purposes of shaving and breakfasting. He stepped at length lazily out of bed, and when he felt his feet, again yawned and stretched himself. Then he lit his fire, placed his bit of a kettle on the top of it, and returned to bed, where he lay with his eye fixed on the fire, watching the crackling blaze insinuate itself through the wood and coal. Once, however, it began to fail, so he had to get up and assist it, by blowing, and bits of paper; and it seemed in so precarious a state that he determined not again to lie down, but sit on the bedside; as he did, with his arms folded, ready to resume operations if necessary. In this posture he remained for some time, watching his little fire, and listlessly listening to the discordant jangling of innumerable church-bells, clamorously calling the citizens to their devotions. The current of thoughts passing through his mind was something like the following:—

"Heigho!—O Lord!—Dull as ditch water!—This is my only holiday, yet I don't seem to enjoy it!—for I feel knocked up with my week's work! What a life mine is, to be sure! Here am I, in my eight-and-twentieth year, and for four long years have been one of the shopmen at Tag-rag & Co.'s, slaving from half-past seven o'clock in the morning till nine at night, and all for a salary of £35 a-year, and my board! And Mr. Tag-rag—eugh! what a beast!—is always telling me how high he's raised my salary! Thirty-five pounds a-year is all I have for lodging, and appearing like a gentleman! O Lord! it can't,

last ; for sometimes I feel getting desperate—such strange thoughts come into my mind !—Seven shillings a-week do I pay for this cursed hole (he uttered these words with a bitter emphasis, accompanied by a disgusting look round the little room) that one couldn't swing a cat in without touching the four sides ! Last winter, three of our gents (*i.e.* his fellow-shopmen) came to tea with me one Sunday night ; and bitter cold as it was, we four made this cursed doghole so hot, we were obliged to open the window !—And as for accommodation.—I recollect I had to borrow two nasty chairs from the people below, who on the next Sunday borrowed my only decanter and, in return, hang them, cracked, it !—Curse me, say I, if this life is worth having ! It's all the very vanity of vanities—as it's said somewhere in the Bible—and no mistake ! Fag, fag fag, all one's days and—what for ? Thirty-five pounds a-year, and '*no advance* !' Bah, bells ! ring away till you're all cracked !—Now do you think *I'm* going to be mew'd up in church on this the only day out of the seven I've got to sweeten myself in, and sniff fresh air ? A precious joke that would be ! Whew !—after all, I'd almost as lieve sit here ; for what's the use of my going out ? Everybody I see out is happy, excepting me, and the poor chaps that are like me !—Everybody laughs when they see me, and know that I'm only a tallow-faced counter-jumper—for whom it's no use to go out ! Oh, Lord ! what's the use of being good-looking, as some chaps say I am ?" Here he instinctively passed his left hand through a profusion of sandy-coloured hair, and cast an eye towards the bit of fractured looking-glass that hung against the wall, and which, by faithfully representing to him a by no means plain set of features (despite the dismal hue of his hair) whenever he chose to appeal to it, had afforded him more enjoyment than any other object in the world for years. "Ah, Lord ! many and many's the fine gal I've done my best to attract the notice of, while I was serving her in the shop,—that is, when I've seen her get out of a carriage ! There has been luck to many a chap like me, in the same line of speculation : look at Tom Tarnish—how did he get Miss Twang, the rich pianoforte maker's daughter ?—and now he's cut the shop, and lives at Hackney, like a regular gentleman ! Ah ! that *was* a stroke ! But somehow it hasn't answered with *me* yet : the gals don't take ! Lord, how I have set my eyes, to be sure, and ogled them—all of them don't seem to dislike the thing—and sometimes they'll smile, in a sort of way that says I'm safe—but it's been no use yet, not a bit of it !—My eyes ! catch me, by the way, ever nodding again to a lady on the Sunday, that had smiled when I stared at her while serving her in the shop—after what happened to me a month or two ago in the Park ! Didn't I feel like damaged goods, just then ! But it's no matter, women are so different at different times !—Very likely I mismanaged the thing. By the way, what a precious puppy of a chap the fellow was that came up to her at the time she stepped out of her carriage to walk a bit ! As for good looks—cut me to ribands (another glance at the glass) no ; I a'n't afraid *there*, neither—but—heigho !—I suppose he was, as they say, born with a golden spoon in his mouth, and had never so many a thousand a-year, to make up to him for never so few brains ! He was uncommon well-dressed, though, I must own. What trousers !—they stuck so natural to him, he might have been born in them. And his waistcoat, and satin stock—what an air ! And yet, his figure was nothing *very* out of the way ! His gloves, as white as snow ; I've no doubt he wears a pair of them a-day—my stars ! that's three-and-sixpence a-day ; for don't I know what *they* cost ? Whew ! if I had but the cash to carry on that sort of thing ! And when he'd seen her into her carriage—the horse he got on !—and what a tip-top groom—that chap's wages, I'll answer for it, were equal to my salary ! (Here was a long pause.) Now, just for the fun of the thing, only suppose luck was to befall *me* ! Say somebody was to leave me lots of cash,—many thou-

sands a-year, or something in that line ! My stars ! wouldn't I go it with the best of them ! (Another long pause.) Gad, I really should hardly know how to begin to spend it ! I think, by the way, I'd buy a title to set off with—for what won't money buy ? The thing's often done ; there was a great biscuit-baker in the city, the other day, made a baronet of, all for his money—and why shouldn't I ?” He grew a little heated with the progress of his reflections, clapping his hands with involuntary energy, as he stretched them out to their fullest extent, to give effect to a very hearty yawn. “Lord, only think how it would sound !—

SIR TITTLBAT TITMOUSE, BARONET ; OR, LORD TITMOUSE.

“The very first place I'd go to, after I'd got my title, and was rigged out in Stulze's tip-top, should be—our cursed shop, to buy a dozen or two pair of white kid. What a flutter there would be among the poor pale devils as were standing, just as ever, behind the counters, at Tag-rag and Co.'s when my carriage drew up, and I stepped, a tip-top swell, into the shop. Tag-rag would come and attend to me himself. No, he wouldn't—pride wouldn't let him. I don't know, though : what wouldn't he do to turn a penny, and make two-and-ninepence into three-and-a-penny ? I shouldn't *quite* come Captain Stiff over him, I think ; but I should treat him with a kind of an air, too, as if—hem ! 'Pon my life ! how delightful ! (A sigh and a pause.) Yes, I should often come to the shop. Gad, it would be half the fun of my fortune ! How they would envy me, to be sure ! How one should enjoy it ! I wouldn't think of *marrying* till—and yet I won't say either ; if I got among some of them out-and-outers—those first-rate articles—that lady, for instance, the other day in the park—I should like to see her cut me as she did, with ten thousand a-year in my pocket ! Why, she'd be running after *me*, or there's no truth in novels, which I'm sure there's often a great deal in. Oh, of course, I might marry whom I pleased. Who couldn't be got with ten thousand a-year ? (Another pause.) I should go abroad to Russia directly ; for they tell me there's a man lives there who could dye this hair of mine any colour I liked—egad ! I'd come home as black as a crow, and hold up my head as high as any of them ! While I was about it, I'd have a touch at my eyebrows—” Crash went all his castle-building, at the sound of his tea-kettle, hissing, whizzing, sputtering in the agonies of boiling over ; as if the intolerable heat of the fire had driven desperate the poor creature placed upon it, who instinctively tried thus to extinguish the cause of its anguish. Having taken it off and placed it upon the hob, and put on the fire a tiny fragment of fresh coal, he began to make preparations for shaving, by pouring some of the hot water into an old teacup, which was presently to serve for the purposes of breakfast. Then he spread out a bit of crumpled whity-brown paper, in which had been folded up a couple of cigars, bought overnight for the Sunday's special enjoyment—and as to which, if he supposed they had come from any place beyond the four seas, I imagine him to have been slightly mistaken. He placed this bit of paper on the little mantelpiece ; drew his solitary, well-worn razor several times across the palm of his left hand ; dipped his brush, worn within a third of an inch to the stump, into the hot water ; presently passed it over so much of his face as he intended to shave ; then rubbed on the damp surface a bit of yellow soap—and in less than five minutes Mr. Titmouse was a shaved man. But mark—don't suppose that he had performed an extensive operation. One would have thought him anxious to get rid of as much as possible of his abominable sandy-coloured hair—quite the contrary. Every hair of his spreading whiskers was sacred from the touch of steel ; and a bushy crop of hair stretched underneath his chin, coming curled out on each side of it, above his stock, like two little horns, or tusks. An imperial

—i.e., a dirt-coloured tuft of hair, permitted to grow perpendicularly down the under lip of puppies and a pair of promising moustaches, poor Mr. Titmouse had been compelled to sacrifice some time before to the tyrannical whimsies of his vulgar employer, Mr. Tag-rag, who imagined them not to be exactly suitable appendages for counter-jumpers. So that it will be seen that the space shaved over on this occasion was somewhat circumscribed. This operation over, he took out of his trunk an old dirty-looking pomatum pot. A little of its contents, extracted on the tips of his two fore-fingers, he stroked carefully into his eyebrows; then spreading some on the palms of his hands, he rubbed it vigorously into his stubborn hair and whiskers for some quarter of an hour; and then combed and brushed his hair into half-a-dozen different dispositions—so fastidious in that matter was Mr. Titmouse. Then he dipped the end of a towel into a little water, and twisting it round his right forefinger, passed it gently over his face, carefully avoiding his eyebrows, and the hair at the top, sides, and bottom of his face, which he then wiped with a dry corner of the towel; and no farther did Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse think it necessary to carry his ablutions. Had he been able to “see himself as others saw him,” in respect of those neglected regions which lay somewhere behind and beneath his ears, he might not possibly have thought it superfluous to irrigate them with a little soap and water; but, after all, he knew best; it might have given him cold; and besides, his hair was very thick and long behind, and might perhaps conceal anything that was unsightly. Then Mr. Titmouse drew from underneath the bed a bottle of Warren’s “incomparable blacking,” and a couple of brushes, with great labour and skill polishing his boots up to a wonderful point of brilliancy. Having replaced his blacking implements under the bed and washed his hands, he devoted a few moments to boiling about three teaspoonfuls of coffee (as it was styled on the paper from which he took, and in which he had bought it—whereas it was, in fact, *chicory*). Then he drew forth from his trunk a calico shirt, with linen wristbands and collar, which had been worn only twice—since its last washing, i.e., on the preceding two Sundays; and put it on, taking great care not to rumple a very showy front, containing three little rows of frills, in the middle one of which he stuck three “studs,” connected together with two little gilt chains, looking exceedingly stylish—especially coupled with a span-new satin stock, which he next buckled round his neck. Having put on his bright boots (without, I am sorry to say, any stockings), he carefully insinuated his legs into a pair of white trousers, for the first time since their last washing; and what with his short straps and high braces, they were so tight that you would have feared their bursting if he should have sat down hastily. I am almost afraid that I shall hardly be believed; but it is a fact, that the next thing he did was to attach a pair of spurs to his boots; but, to be sure, it was not *impossible* that he might intend to ride during the day. Then he put on a queer kind of under-waistcoat, which, in fact, was only a roll-collar of rather faded pea-green silk, and designed to set off a very fine flowered damson-coloured silk waistcoat; over which he drew a massive mosaic-gold chain (to purchase which he had sold a serviceable silver watch), which had been carefully wrapped up in cotton wool; from which soft depository, also, he drew HIS RING (those must have been sharp eyes which could tell, at a distance, and in a hurry, that it was not diamond), which he placed on the stumpy little finger of his red and thick right hand—and contemplated its sparkle with exquisite satisfaction. Having proceeded thus far with his toilet, he sat down to his breakfast, spreading the shirt he had taken off upon his lap, to preserve his white trousers from spot or stain—his thoughts alternating between his late waking vision and his purposes for the day. He had no butter, having used the last on the preceding morning; so he was fain

to put up with dry bread—and very dry and teeth-trying it was, poor fellow;—but his eye lit on his ring! Having swallowed two cups of his *quasi*-coffee (enough! such stuff!) he resumed his toilet, by drawing out of his other trunk his blue surtout, with embossed silk buttons and velvet collar, and an outside pocket in the left breast. Having smoothed down a few creases, he put it on:—then, before the little vulgar fraction of a glass, he stood twitching about the collar, and sleeves, and front, so as to make them sit well; concluding with a careful elongation of the wristbands of his shirt, so as to show their whiteness gracefully beyond the cuff of his coat-sleeve; and he succeeded in producing a sort of white boundary line between the blue of his coat-sleeve and the red of his hand. At that useful member he could not help looking with a sigh, as he had often done before—for it was not a handsome hand. It was broad and red, and the fingers were thick and stumpy, with very coarse deep wrinkles at every joint. His nails also were flat and shapeless; and he used to be continually gnawing them till he had succeeded in getting them down to the quick—and they were a sight to set one's teeth on edge. Then he extracted from the first-mentioned trunk a white pocket-handkerchief—an exemplary one, that had gone through four Sunday's show (not *use*, be it understood), and yet was capable of exhibition again. A pair of sky-coloured kid gloves next made their appearance; which, however, showed such bare-faced marks of former service as rendered indispensable a ten minutes' rubbing with bread crumbs. His Sunday hat, carefully covered with silver-paper, was next gently removed from its wellworn box—ah, how lightly and delicately did he pass his smoothing hand round its glossy surface! Lastly, he took down a thin black cane, with a gilt head, and full brown tassel, from a peg behind the door—and his toilet was complete. Laying down his cane for a moment, he passed his hands again through his hair, arranging it so as to fall nicely on each side beneath his hat, which he then placed upon his head, with an elegant inclination towards the left side. He was really not bad-looking, in spite of his sandy-coloured hair. His forehead, to be sure, was contracted, and his eyes were of a very light colour, and a trifle too protuberant; but his mouth was rather well-formed, and being seldom closed, exhibited his very beautiful teeth; and his nose was of that description which generally passes for a Roman nose. His countenance wore generally a smile, and was expressive of—self-satisfaction; and surely any expression is better than none at all. As for there being the slightest trace of *intellect* in it, I should be misleading the reader if I were to say anything of the sort. In height, he was about five feet and a quarter of an inch, *in his boots*, and he was rather strongly set, with a little tendency to round shoulders; but his limbs were pliant, and his motions nimble.

Here you have, then, Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse to the life—certainly no more than an average sample of his kind; but as he is to go through a considerable variety of situation and circumstance, I thought you would like to have him as distinctly before your mind's eye as it was in my power to present him. Well—he put his hat on, as I have said; buttoned the lowest two buttons of his surtout, and stuck his white pocket-handkerchief into the outside pocket in front, as already mentioned, anxiously disposing it so as to let a little of it appear above the edge of the pocket, with a sort of careful carelessness—a graceful contrast to the blue; drew on his gloves; took his cane in his hand; drained the last sad remnant of infusion of chicory in his coffee-cup; and the sun shining in the full splendour of a July noon, and promising a glorious day, forth sallied this poor fellow, an Oxford Street Adonis, going forth conquering and to conquer! Petty finery without, a pinched and stinted stomach within; a case of Back *versus* Belly (as the lawyers would say), the plaintiff winning in a canter! Forth sallied, I say, Mr. Titmouse, as also sallied forth that day

some five or six thousand similar personages, down the narrow, creaking, close staircase, which he had not quitted before he heard exclaimed from an opposite window, "My eyes! *a'n't* that a swell!" He felt how true the observation was, and that at that moment he was somewhat out of his element; so he hurried on, and soon reached the great broad street, apostrophized by the celebrated Opium-Eater, with bitter feeling, as—"Oxford Street!—stony-hearted stepmother! Thou that listenest to the sighs of orphans, and drinkest the tears of children!" Here, though his spirits were not just then very buoyant, our poor little dandy breathed more freely than when he was passing through the nasty crowded court (Closet Court) which he had just quitted. He passed and met hundreds who, like himself, seemed released for a precious day's interval from miserable confinement and slavery during the week; but there were not very many of them who could vie with him in elegance of appearance—and that was a *luxury*! Who could do justice to the air with which he strutted along? He felt as happy, poor soul, in his little ostentation, as his Corinthian rival in tip-top turn-out, after twice as long, and as anxious, and fifty times as expensive, preparations for effective public display! Nay, *my* poor swell was in some respects greatly the superior of such an one as I have alluded to. Mr. Titmouse *did*, to a great degree, bedizen his back—at the expense of his belly; whereas, the Corinthian exquisite, too often taking advantage of station and influence, recklessly both pampers his luxurious appetite within, and decorates his person without, at the expense of innumerable heart-aching creditors. I do not mean, however, to claim any real merit for Mr. Titmouse on this score, because I am not sure how he would act if he were to become possessed of his magnificent rival's means and opportunities for the perpetration of gentlemanly frauds on a splendid scale. But we shall perhaps see by-and-by.

Mr. Titmouse walked along with leisurely step; for haste and perspiration were vulgar, and he had the day before him. Observe, now, the careless glance of self-satisfaction with which he occasionally regards his bright boots, with their martial appendage, giving out a faint clinking sound as he heavily treads the broad flags; his spotless trousers, his tight surtout, and the tip of white handkerchief peeping *accidentally* out in front! A pleasant sight it was to behold him in a chance rencontre with some one genteel enough to be recognised—as he stood, resting on his left leg; his left arms stuck upon his hip; the right leg easily bent outwards; his right hand lightly holding his ebony cane, with the gilt head of which he occasionally tapped his teeth; and his eyes, half closed, scrutinizing the face and figure of each "*pretty gal*" as she passed, and to whom he had a delicious consciousness that he appeared an object of interest! This was indeed HAPPINESS, as far as his forlorn condition could admit of his enjoying it. He had no particular object in view. A tiff overnight with two of his shop-mates had broken off a party which they had agreed the Sunday preceding in forming, to go that day to Greenwich; and this trifling circumstance had a little soured his temper, depressed as were his spirits before. He resolved to-day to walk straight on, and dine somewhere a little way out of town, by way of passing the time till four o'clock, at which hour he intended to make his appearance in Hyde Park, "to see the swells and the fashions," which was his favourite Sunday occupation.

His condition was, indeed, forlorn in the extreme. To say nothing of his *prospects* in life—what was his present condition? A shopman, with £35 a-year, out of which he had to find his clothing, washing, lodging, and all other incidental expenses—his board being found him by his employers? He was five weeks in arrear to his landlady—a corpulent old termagant, whom nothing could have induced him to risk offending but his over-mastering love of finery; for I grieve to say, that this deficiency had been occasioned by

his purchase of the ring he then wore with so much pride. How he had contrived to pacify her—lie upon lie he must have had recourse to—I know not. He was in debt, too, to his poor washerwoman in five or six shillings for at least a quarter's washing; and owed five times that amount to a little old tailor, who, with huge spectacles on his nose, turned up to him, out of a little cupboard which he occupied in Closet Court, and which Titmouse had to pass whenever he went to or from his lodgings, a lean, sallow, wrinkled face, imploring him to "settle his small account." All the cash in hand which he had to meet contingencies between that day and quarter-day, which was six weeks off, was about twenty-six shillings, of which he had taken one for the present day's expenses!

Revolving these somewhat disheartening matters in his mind, he passed easily and leisurely along the whole length of Oxford Street. No one could have judged from his dressy appearance, the constant smirk on his face, and his confident air, how very miserable that poor little dandy was; but three-fourths of his misery were occasioned by the impossibility he felt of his ever being able to indulge in his propensities for finery and display. Nothing better had he to occupy his few thoughts. He had had only a plain mercantile education, as it is called, *i.e.*, reading, writing, and arithmetic; beyond a very moderate acquaintance with these, he knew nothing whatever, not having read more than a few novels, and plays, and sporting newspapers. Deplorable, however, as were his circumstances—

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast;"

and probably, in common with most who are miserable from straitened circumstances, he often conceived, and secretly relied upon, the possibility of some unexpected and accidental change for the better; he had heard and read of extraordinary cases of LUCK. Why might he not be one of the LUCKY? A rich girl might fall in love with him—that was, poor fellow! in his consideration, one of the least unlikely ways of luck's advent; or some one might leave him money; or he might win a prize in the lottery;—all these, and other accidental modes of getting enriched, frequently occurred to the well-regulated mind of Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse; but he never once thought of one thing, *viz.*—of determined, unwearied industry, and perseverance in the way of his business, conducing to such a result.

Is his case a solitary one? Dear reader—you may be unlike Tittlebat Titmouse in every respect except *one*!

On he walked towards Bayswater; and finding it yet early, and considering that the further he went from town the better prospect there was of his being able, with little sacrifice of appearances, to get a dinner consistent with the means he carried about with him,—*viz.*, one shilling,—he pursued his way a mile or two beyond Bayswater, and, sure enough, came at length upon a nice little public-house on the roadside, called the Squaretoes Arms. Very tired, and very dusty, he first sat down in a small back-room to rest himself, and took the opportunity to call for a clothes-brush and shoe-brush, to relieve his clothes and boots from the heavy dust upon them. Having thus attended to his outer man, as far as circumstances would permit, he bethought himself of his inner man, whose cravings he satisfied with a pretty substantial mutton-pie and a pint of porter. This fare, together with a penny to the little girl who waited on him, cost him tenpence; and having somewhat refreshed himself, he began to think of returning to town. Having lit one of his two cigars, he sallied forth, puffing along with an air of quiet enjoyment. Dinner, however humble, seldom fails, especially when accompanied by a fair draught of good porter, in some considerable degree to tranquillize the animal spirits; and that soothing effect began soon to be experienced by Mr. Titmouse. The sedative *cause* he errone-

cously considered to be the cigar he was smoking; whereas, in fact, the only tobacco he had imbibed was from the porter. But, however that might be, he certainly returned towards town in a far calmer and even more cheerful humour than that in which he had quitted it an hour or two before.

As he approached Cumberland Gate, it was about half-past five; and the park might be said to be at its *acme* of fashion, as far as that could be indicated by a sluggish stream of carriages, three and four abreast—coroneted panels in abundance—noble and well-known equestrians of both sexes, in troops—and some thousand pedestrians of the same description. So continuous was the throng of carriages and horsemen, that Titmouse did not find it the easiest matter in the world to dart across to the footpath in the inner circle. That, however, he presently safely accomplished, encountering no more serious mischance than the muttered “D—n your eyes!” of a haughty groom, between whom and his master Mr. Titmouse had presumed to intervene. What a crowd of elegant women, many of them young and beautiful (who but such, to be sure, would become, or be allowed to become, pedestrians in the park?), he encountered, as he slowly sauntered on, all of them obsequiously attended by brilliant beaux! Lords and ladies were here manifestly as plentiful as plebeians in Oxford Street. What an enchanted ground! How delicious this soft crush and flutter of aristocracy! Poor Titmouse felt a withering consciousness of his utter insignificance. Many a sigh of dissatisfaction and envy escaped him; yet he stepped along with a tolerably assured air, looking everybody he met straight in the face, and occasionally twirling about his little cane with an air which seemed to say—“Whatever opinion *you* may form of me, I have a very good opinion of myself.” Indeed, was he not as much a man—an Englishman—as the best of them? What was the real difference between Count Do-’em-all and Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse? Only that the Count had dark hair and whiskers, and owed more money than Mr. Titmouse’s creditors could be persuaded to allow *him* to owe! Would to Heaven, thought Titmouse, that any *one* tailor would patronise *him* as half-a-dozen had patronised the Count! If pretty ladies of quality did not disdain a walking advertisement of a few first-rate tailors, like the count, why should they turn up their noses at an assistant in an extensive wholesale and retail establishment in Oxford Street, conversant with the qualities and prices of the most beautiful articles of female attire? Yet, alas, they *did* so! He sighed heavily. Leaning against the railing in a studied attitude, and eyeing wistfully each gay and fashionable equipage, with its often lovely and sometimes haughty enclosure as it rolled slowly past him, Mr. Titmouse became more and more convinced of a great practical truth—viz., that the only real distinction between mankind was that effected by money. Want of money alone had placed him in his present abject position. Abject, indeed! By the great folk, who were passing him on all sides, he felt, well-dressed as he believed himself to be, that he was no more noticed than as if he had been an ant, a bluebottle fly, or a black beetle! He looked, and sighed—sighed, and looked—looked, and sighed again, in a kind of agony of vain longing. While his only day in the week for breathing fresh air, and appearing like a gentleman in the world, was rapidly drawing to a close, and he was beginning to think of returning to the dog-hole he had crawled out of in the morning, and to the shop for the rest of the week, the great, the gay, and happy folk he was looking at, were thinking of driving home to dress for their grand dinners, and to lay out every kind of fine amusement for the ensuing week, and that was the sort of life they led every day in the week. He heaved a profound sigh. At that moment a superb cab, with a gentleman in it, dressed in great elegance, and with a very keen and striking countenance, came up with a cab of still more exquisite structure and appointments, and at which Titmouse gazed with unutterable feelings of

envy—in which sat a young man, evidently of consequence ; very handsome, with splendid moustaches ; perfectly well-dressed ; holding the reins and whip gracefully in hands glistening in straw-coloured kid gloves, and between the two gentlemen ensued the following low-toned colloquy, which it were to be wished that every such sighing simpleton (as Titmouse must, I fear by this time, appear to the reader) could have overheard.

“Ah, Fitz!” said the former-mentioned gentleman to the latter, who suddenly reddened when he perceived who had addressed him. The manner of the speaker was execrably—infernally familiar and presumptuous—but how could the embarrassed *swell* help himself? “When did you return to town?” “Last night only——” “Enjoyed yourself, I hope?” “Pretty well—but—I suppose you ——” “Sorry for it,” interrupted the first speaker in a lower tone, perceiving the vexation of his companion ; “but can’t help it, you know.” “When?” “To-morrow at nine. Monstrous sorry for it—’pon my soul, you really must look sharp, or the thing won’t go on much longer.” “Must it be, really?” inquired the other, biting his lips—at that moment kissing his hand to a very beautiful girl, who slowly passed him in a coroneted chariot—“must it really be, Joe?” he repeated, turning towards his companion a pale and bitterly chagrined countenance. “Poz, ’pon my life. Cage clean, however, and not very full—just at present——” “Would not *Wednesday*?” inquired the other, leaning forward towards the former speaker’s cab, and whispering with an air of intense earnestness. “The fact is, I’ve engagements at C——’s on Monday and Tuesday nights with one or two country cousins, and I *may* be in a condition—eh? you understand?”

His companion shook his head distrustfully.

“Upon my word and honour as a gentleman, it’s the fact!” said the other, in a low vehement tone. “Then—say *Wednesday*, nine o’clock A.M. You understand? No mistake, Fitz!” replied his companion, looking him steadily in the face as he spoke. “None—honour!” After a pause—“Who is it?” His companion took a slip of paper out of his pocket, and in a whisper read from it—“Cabs, harness, etc., £297 10s.” “A villain! It’s been of only three years’ standing,” interrupted the other, in an indignant mutter. “Between ourselves, he *is* rather a sharp hand. Then, I’m sorry to say there’s a detainer or two I have had a hint of——” “D—n their souls!” exclaimed the other, with an expression of mingled disgust, vexation, and hatred ; and adding, “*Wednesday—nine*”—drove off, a picture of tranquil enjoyment.

I need hardly say that *he* was a fashionable young spendthrift, and the other a sheriff’s officer of the first water,—the genteeldest *beak* that ever was known or heard of,—who had been on the look-out for him several days, and with whom the happy youngster was doomed to spend some considerable time at a cheerful residence in Chancery Lane, bleeding gold at every pore the while ; his only chance of avoiding which, was, as he had truly hinted, an honourable attempt on the purses of two hospitable country cousins, in the meanwhile, at C——’s ! And if he did not succeed in that enterprise, so that he *must* go to cage, he lost the only chance he had for some time of securing an exemption from such annoyance, by entering Parliament to protect the liberties of the people—an eloquent and resolute champion of freedom in trade, religion, and everything else ; and an abolitionist of everything, including, especially, negro slavery and imprisonment for debt—two execrable violations of the natural rights of mankind.

But I have, for several minutes, lost sight of the admiring Titmouse.

“Why,” thought he, “am *I* thus spited by fortune? The only thing she’s given *me* is—nothing! D—n *everything*!” exclaimed Mr. Titmouse aloud, at the same time starting off, to the infinite astonishment of an old peer, who had been for some minutes standing leaning against the railings, close beside him ;

who was master of a magnificent fortune, "with all appliances and means to boot"; with a fine grown-up family, his eldest son and heir having just gained a Double First, and promising wonders; possessing many mansions in different parts of England; of exquisite taste and accomplishment; and the representative of one of the oldest families in England; but who at that moment loathed everything and everybody, including himself, because the minister had the day before intimated to him that he could not give him a vacant riband, for which he had applied, unless he could command two more votes in the Lower House, and which at present his lordship saw no earthly means of doing. Yes, the Earl of Cheviotdale and Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse were both miserable men; both had been hardly dealt with by fortune; both were greatly to be pitied; and both quitted the park, about the same time, with a decided misanthropic tendency.

Mr. Titmouse walked along Piccadilly with a truly chopfallen and disconsolate air. He almost felt dissatisfied even with his personal appearance. Dress as he would, no one seemed to care a curse for him; and, to his momentarily aundiced eye, he seemed equipped in only second-hand and shabby finery: and then he was really such a *poor* devil! Do not, however, let the reader suppose that this was an unusual mood with Mr. Titmouse. No such thing. Like the Irishman who "married a wife for to make him *un-aisy*"; and also not unlike the moth that *will* haunt the brightness which is her destruction; so poor Titmouse, Sunday after Sunday, dressed himself out as elaborately as he had done on the present occasion, and then always betook himself to the scene he had just again witnessed, and which once again had excited only those feelings of envy, bitterness, and despair, which I have been describing, and which, on every such occasion, he experienced with, if possible, increased intensity.

What to do with himself till it was time to return to his cheerless lodgings he did not exactly know; so he loitered along at a snail's pace. He stood for some time staring at the passengers, their luggage, the coaches they were ascending and alighting from, and listening to the strange medley of coachmen's, guards', and porters' vociferations; and passengers' greetings and leave-takings—always to be observed at the White Horse Cellar. Then he passed along, till a street row, near the Haymarket, attracted his attention and interested his feelings; for it ended in a regular set-to between two watermen attached to the adjoining coach-stand. Here he conceived himself looking on with the easy air of a swell; and the ordinary penalty (paying for his footing) was attempted to be exacted from him; but he had nothing to be picked out of any of his pockets except that under his very nose, and which contained his white handkerchief. This over, he struck into Leicester Square, where (he was in luck that night), hurrying up to another crowd at the further end, he found a man preaching with infinite energy. Mr. Titmouse looked on, and listened for two or three minutes with apparent interest; and then, with a countenance in which pity struggled with contempt, muttered, loud enough to be heard by all near him, "Poor devil!" and walked off. He had not proceeded many steps, before it occurred to him that a friend—one Robert Huckaback, much such another one as himself—lived in one of the narrow, dingy streets in the neighbourhood. He determined to take the chances of his being at home, and if so, of spending the remainder of the evening with him. Huckaback's quarters were in the same ambitious proximity to heaven as his own; the only difference being, that they were a trifle cheaper and larger. He answered the door himself, having only the moment before returned from *his* Sunday's excursion,—i.e., the Jack Straw's Castle Tea-Gardens, at Highgate, where, in company with several of his friends, he had "spent a jolly afternoon." He ordered in a glass of negus from the adjoining public-house after some discussion, which ended in an agreement that he should stand treat that night, and Titmouse on the ensuing

Sunday night. As soon as the negus arrived, accompanied by two sea-biscuits, which looked so hard and hopeless that they would have made the nerves thrill within the teeth of him that meditated attempting to masticate them, the candle was lit—Huckaback handed a cigar to his friend; and both began to puff away, and chatter pleasantly concerning the many events and scenes of the day.

"Anything stirring in to-day's *Flash*?" inquired Titmouse, as his eye caught sight of a copy of that able and interesting Sunday newspaper, the *Sunday Flash*, which Huckaback had hired for the evening from the news-shop on the ground-floor of his lodgings.

Mr. Huckaback removed his cigar from his mouth, and holding it between the first and second fingers of his right hand, in a knowing style, with closed eyes and inflated cheeks, very slowly ejected the smoke which he had last inhaled, and rose and got the paper from the top of the drawers.

"Here's a mark of a beastly porter-pot that's been set upon it, by all that's holy! It's been at the public-house! Too bad of Mrs. Coggs to send it me up in this state!" said he, handling it as though its touch were contamination. (He was to pay only a halfpenny for the perusal of it.) "Faugh! how it stinks!"

"What a horrid beast she must be!" exclaimed Titmouse, after, in like manner as his friend, expelling his mouthful of smoke. "But, since better can't be had, let's hear what news is in it. Demmee! it's the only paper published, in my opinion, that's worth reading! Any fights a-stirring?"

"Haven't come to them yet; give a man *time*, Titty!" replied Huckaback, fixing his feet on another chair, and drawing the candle closer to the paper. "It says, by the way, that the Duke of Dunderhead is certainly making up to Mrs. Thumps, the rich cheesemonger's widow; a precious good hit that, isn't it? You know the duke's as poor as a rat!" "Oh, *that's* no news! It's been in the papers for I don't know how long. Egad, 'twill quite set him up—and no mistake. Seen the duke ever?" "Ye—es! Oh, several times!" replied Huckaback. This was a lie, and Huckaback knew that it was. "Deuced good-looking, I suppose?" "Why—middling; I should say middling. Know *some* that needn't fear to compare with him—eh? Tit?"—and Huckaback winked archly at his friend, meaning him to consider the words as applicable to the speaker. "Ha, ha, ha!—a pretty joke! But come, that's a good chap! You can't be reading both these two sheets at once—give us the other sheet, and set the candle right betwixt us! Come, fair's the word!"

Huckaback, thus appealed to, did as his friend requested; and the two gentlemen read and smoked for some minutes in silence.

"Well—I shall spell over the advertisements now," said Titmouse; "there's a pretty lot of them—and I've read everything else (though precious little there is, *here*, besides!) So, here goes! One *may* hear of a prime situation, you know—and I'm quite sick of Tag-rag!"

Another interval of silence ensued. Huckaback was deep in the instructive details of a trial for murder; and Titmouse, after having glanced listlessly over the entertaining first sheet of advertisements, was on the point of laying down his half of the paper, when he suddenly started in his chair, turned very pale, and stammered—"Hollo! hollo, Hucky!—Why—"

"What's the matter, Tit, eh?" inquired Huckaback, greatly astonished.

For a moment Titmouse made no answer, but, dropping his cigar, fixed his eyes intently on the paper, which began to rustle in his trembling hands. What occasioned this outbreak, with its subsequent agitation, was the following advertisement, which appeared in the most conspicuous part of the *Sunday Flash*:—"—

"Next of Kin—Important.—The next of kin, if any such there be, of Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse, formerly of Whitehaven, cordwainer, and who died

somewhere about the year 1793, in London, may hear of something of the greatest possible importance to himself, or herself, or themselves, by immediately communicating with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, Solicitors, Saffron Hill. No time is to be lost. 9th July, 18—. *The third advertisement.*"

"By George! Here *is* a go!" exclaimed Huckaback, almost as much flustered as Titmouse, over whose shoulder he had hastily read the above paragraph. "We aren't dreaming, Hucky—are we?" inquired Titmouse, faintly, his eyes still glued to the newspaper. "No—by George! Never was either of us fellows so precious wide-awake in our lives before! that I'll answer for!" Titmouse sat still, and turned paler even than before. "Read it up, Huck! Let's hear how it *sounds*, and then we shall believe it!" said he, handing the paper to his friend. Huckaback read it aloud. "It sounds like something, don't it?" inquired Titmouse tremulously, his colour a little returning. "Uncommon! If this isn't *something*, then there's nothing in anything any more!" replied Huckaback solemnly, at the same time emphatically slapping the table. "No!—pon my soul! but do you really think so?" said Titmouse, seeking still further confirmation than he had yet derived from his senses of sight and hearing.

"I do, by jingo!—what a go it is! Well, my poor old mother used to say, 'Depend on it, wonders never *will* cease'; and curse me if she ever said a truer word!"

Titmouse again read over the advertisement; and then picking up and relighting his fragment of cigar, puffed earnestly, in silence, for some moments.

"Such things never happen to such a poor devil of a chap as me!" exclaimed Huckaback, with a sigh. "What *is* in the wind, I wonder?" muttered Titmouse. "Who knows—hem!—who knows? But now, *really*—" He paused, and once more read over the pregnant paragraph. "It can't—no, curse me, it *can't* be—" he added, looking very serious. "What, Tit? *What* can't be?" interrupted Huckaback eagerly. "Why, I've been thinking—but what do *you* think, eh?—it can't be a cursed hoax of the chaps in the premises at Tag-rag's?" "Bo! Is there any of 'em flush enough of money to do the thing? And how should they think it would ever come to be seen by you? Then, besides, there isn't a chap among them that could come up to the composing a piece of composition like that—no, not for all a whole year's salary—there isn't, by George! You and I couldn't do it, and, of course, *they* couldn't!"

"Ah! I don't know," said Titmouse doubtfully. "But—honour!—do you really now think there's anything in it?" "I do—hanged if I don't, Tit!" was the sententious answer.

"Tol de rol, de rol, de rol, de rol—diddl'em daddl'em—bang!" almost shouted Titmouse, jumping up, snapping his fingers, and dancing about in a wild ecstasy, which lasted for nearly a minute.

"Give me your hand, Hucky," said he presently, almost breathless. "If I *am* a made man—tol de rol, lol de rol, lol de rol, lol!—you see, Huck!—if I don't give you the handsomest breastpin you ever saw! No paste! real diamond!—Hurrah! I will, by jingo!"

Huckaback grasped and squeezed his hand. "We've always been friends, Tit—haven't we?" said he, affectionately.

"My room won't hold me to-night!" continued Titmouse; "I'm sure it won't. I feel as if I was, as you may say, swelling all over. I'll walk the streets all night: I couldn't sleep a wink for the life of me. I'll walk about till the shop opens. Oh, faugh! how nasty! Confound the shop, and Tag-rag, and everything and everybody in it! Thirty-five pounds a year! See if I won't spend as much in cigars the first month!"

"Cigars! Is that your go? Now I should take lessons in boxing, to begin

with. It's a deuced high thing, you may depend upon it, and you can't be fit company for swells without it, Tit! You can't, by Jove!"

"Whatever you like, whatever you like, Hucky!" cried Titmouse—adding in a sort of ecstasy, "I'm sorry to say it, but how *precious* lucky that my father and mother's dead, and that I'm an only child—too-ra-laddy, too-ra-laddy!" Here he took such a sudden leap, that I am sorry to say he split his trousers very awkwardly, and that sobered him for a moment, while they made arrangements for cobbling it up as well as might be, with a needle and thread which Huckaback always had by him.

"We're rather jumping in the dark a bit, aren't we, Tit?" inquired Huckaback, while his companion was repairing the breach. "Let's look what it all means—here it is." He read it all aloud again—"greatest possible importance"—"what *can it* mean? Why the deuce couldn't they speak out plainly?"

"What! in a newspaper? Lord, Hucky! how many Titmouses would start up on all sides, if there isn't some already. I wonder what '*greatest possible importance*' can mean, now!"

"Some one's left you an awful lot of money, of course——" "It's too good to be true——" "Or you may have made a *smite*; you a'n't such a bad-looking fellow, when you're dressed as you are now—you a'n't indeed, Titty!" Mr. Titmouse was quite flustered with the mere supposition, and also looked as sheepish as his features would admit of. "E-e-e-eh, Hucky! how ve-ry silly you are!" he simpered. "Or you may be found out heir to some great property, and all that kind of thing. But when do you intend to go to Messrs. What's-their-name? I say, the sooner the better. Come, you've stitched them trousers well enough, now; they'll hold you till you get home—you do brace up uncommon tight! and I'd take off my straps, if I was you. Why shouldn't we go to these gents now? Ah, here they are—Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, solicitors." "I wonder if they're great men? Did you ever hear of them before?" "Haven't I! Their names is always in this same paper; they are every day getting people off out of all kinds of scrapes—they're the chaps *I* should naturally go to if I anyhow got wrong—ahem!" "But, my dear fellow—*Saffron Hill*! Low that—devilish low, 'pon my soul! Never was near it in my life." "But they live there to be near the thieves. Lud, the thieves couldn't do without 'em! But what's that to you? You know 'a very dirty ugly toad has often got a jewel in his belly,' so Shakespeare or some one says. Isn't it enough for *you*, Tit, if they can make good their advertisement? Let's off, Tit—let's off, I say; for you mayn't be able to get there to-morrow—your employers——" "My employers! Do you think, Hucky, I'm going back to business after this?" "Come, come, Titty—not so fast—suppose it all turns out moonshine, after all"—quoth Huckaback, seriously. "Lord, but I *won't* suppose it! It makes me sick to think of nothing coming of it! Let's go off at once, and see what's to be done!"

So Huckaback put the newspaper in his pocket, blew out the candle, and the two started on their important errand. It was well that their means had been too limited to allow of their indulging to a greater extent than a glass of port-wine negus (that was the name under which they drank the "*publican's* port"—i.e., a decoction of oak bark, logwood shavings, and a little brandy) between them; otherwise, excited as were the feelings of each of them by the discovery of the evening, they must in all probability have been guilty of some piece of extravagance in the streets. As it was, they talked very loudly as they went along, and in a tone of conversation pitched perhaps a little too high for their present circumstances, however in unison it might be with the expected circumstances of *one* of them.

In due time they reached the residence of which they were in search. It was a large house, infinitely superior to all its dingy neighbours; and on a

bright brass plate, a yard long at least, and a foot wide, stood the awe-inspiring words, "QUIRK, GAMMON, and SNAP, SOLICITORS."

"Now, Tit," whispered Huckaback, after they had paused for a second or two—"now for it—pluck up a sperrit—ring!" "I—I—'pon my life—I feel all of a sudden uncommon funky—I think that last cigar of yours wasn't—" "Stuff, Tit—ring! ring away! Faint heart never wins!" "Well, it *must* be done; so—here goes, at any rate!" he replied; and with a short nervous jerk he caused a startling clatter within, which was so distinctly audible without, that both of them instinctively *hemmed*, as if to drown the noise which was so much greater than they had expected. In a very few moments they heard some one undoing the fastenings of the door, and the gentlemen looked at one another with an expression of mingled expectation and apprehension. A little old woman at length stood before them with a candle in her hand.

"Who are you?" she exclaimed, crustily. "Is this Messrs.—what is it, Huck?—Oh! Messrs. Quirk and Co.'s?" inquired Titmouse, tapping the end of his cane against his chin, with a desperate effort to appear at his ease.

"Why, where are your eyes? I should think you might have seen what was wrote on this here plate—it's large enough, one should have thought, to be read by them as *can* read! What's your business?" "We want—give us the paper, Huck!"—he added, addressing his companion, who produced it in a moment; and Titmouse would have proceeded to possess the old woman of all his little heart, when she cut him short by saying, snappishly—"They aren't none on 'em in: nor never is on Sundays—so you'll just call to-morrow if you wants 'em. What's your names?" "Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse," answered that gentleman, with a very particular emphasis on each syllable. "Mr. *who*?" exclaimed the old woman, opening her eyes, and raising her hand to the back of her ear. Mr. Titmouse repeated his name more loudly and distinctly. "Tip-petitippety!—what's that?" "No, no!" exclaimed Titmouse peevishly; "I said, Mr. Tit-el-bat Titmouse!—will that suit you?" "Tick-a-tick-a-tick? Well, gracious! if ever I heard such a name. Oh!—I see!—you're making a fool of me! Get off, or I'll call a constable in! Get along with you, you couple of puppies! Is this the way—" "I tell you," interposed Mr. Huckaback angrily, "that this gentleman's name *is* Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse; and you'd better take care what you're at, old woman, for we've come on business of *vital consequence*!" "I dare say it'll keep, then, till to-morrow," tartly added the old woman.

The friends consulted for a moment, and then Titmouse asked if he might go in and write a letter to Messrs. Quirk.

"No, indeed!" said she; "how do I know who you are? There's a public-house close by, where you may write what you like, and bring it here, and they'll get it the first thing in the morning. So that's what you may take away with you!"—with which the complaisant old janitrix shut the door in their faces.

"Huck, 'pon my life, I am afraid there's nothing in it," said Titmouse, despondingly, to his friend—both of them remaining rooted to the spot—"Oudacious old toad!" muttered Huckaback indignantly. "Hucky—I'm *sure* there's nothing in it!" exclaimed Titmouse, after a long pause, looking earnestly at his friend, hoping to draw from him a contrary opinion. "I—I own I don't half like the looks of it," replied Huckaback, putting his newspaper into his pocket again; "but we'll try if we can't write a letter to sound 'em, and so far take the old creature's advice. Here's the public-house she told us of. Come, let's see what's to be done."

Titmouse, deeply depressed, followed his friend; and they soon provided

themselves with two glasses of stout, and after a little difficulty, with implements for writing. That they made good use of their time and materials, let the following epistle prove. It was their joint composition, and here is an exact copy of it :—

“ To Messrs. QUIRK, GAMMON, and SNAP.

“ SIR,—Your Names being Put In an Advertisement in This present *Sunday Flash*, Newspaper of To Day's Date, Mr. T. T. Begs To inform Your respectable House I feel Uncommon anxious To speak with them On This *truly interesting subject*, seeing It mentions The Name Of Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse, which Two last Names Of That Deceased Person *my Own Name Is*, which can *Any Day* (As soon As Possible) call and *prove* To you, By telling you The Same, *truly*. He being Engaged in Business During the week Very close (for The Present), I hope that If they Have Any thing particlular To say To Him, they will write To me without The least Delay and please address T. T., at Tag-rag and Co.'s, No. 375, Oxford Street, Post-Paid, which will ensure Its Being duly Taken In By my Employers, and am, Gents, Yours to Command,

“ TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE.

“ P.S.—My Friend, that Is With me writing This (Mr. Robert Huckaback), can prove who I am If necessitated so to do.

“ N.B.—Shall have no objections to do the Liberal Thing if anything suitable Turns Up Of It.

“ T. T.

(“ *Sunday Evening*, 9th July, 18—.

“ Forgot to Say, am The only Child of my Honoured Parents, one of which (my Mother) Died before I knew them In Lawful Wedloc, and Was 27 last Birth Day. Never having Seen your Advertisement Till This Night, wh, if Necessary *can Prove*.”)

This perspicuous and truly elegant performance having been thrice subjected to the critical examination of the friends (the paragraph concerning Huckaback having been inserted at the instance of that gentleman, who wished to be mixed up from the beginning with so promising an affair), was then folded up, and directed to “ Messrs. Quirk and Co.,” a great straggling wet wafer having been first put upon it. It was safely deposited, a few minutes afterwards, with the old woman of the house ; and then the two West End gentlemen hastened away from that truly plebeian part of the town. Under three different gaslights did they stop, take out the newspaper, and spell over the advertisement ; by which ingenious processes they at length succeeded in satisfying themselves that there *was* something in it—a fact of which, upon the old woman shutting the door in their faces, it may be recollected they had had grievous misgivings. They parted, however, with a considerable abatement of the excitement with which they had set out on their voyage of discovery.

Mr. Titmouse did not, on reaching his room take off and lay aside his precious Sunday apparel, with his accustomed care and deliberation. On the contrary, he peeled it off, as it were, and threw himself on the bed as quickly as possible. in order that he might calmly revolve the immense event of the day in his mind, which it had agitated like a stone thrown into a stagnant pool by the roadside. Oh, how restless was he !—not more so could he have been had he lain between horse-hair sheets. He repeatedly got up and walked about two or three little steps, which were all that his room admitted of. At the very first peep of daylight he started out of bed, got out of his pocket the newspaper which Huckaback had lent him, strove to decipher the advertisement, and then sunk into bed again—but not to sleep, till four or five o'clock ; having nevertheless to rise at half-past six, to resume his detested duties at Tag-rag and Co.'s,

whose shop he assisted in opening at seven o'clock, as usual. When he and his shopmates were sitting together at breakfast, he could not help letting out a little, vaguely and mysteriously, about "something that would happen in the course of the day;" and thereby succeeded in satisfying his experienced companions that he expected the visit of a policeman, for some *row* he had been concerned in over-night. Well, eight, nine, ten o'clock wore away heavily, and nothing transpired, alas! to vary the monotonous duties in which Mr. Titmouse was engaged; bale after bale, and package after package, he took down and put up again, at the bidding of pretty, capricious customers; silk, satin, bombasins, crapes, muslins, ribands, gloves, he assisted in displaying and disposing of as usual; but it was clear that his powerful understanding could no longer settle itself, as before, upon his responsible and arduous duties. Every other minute he cast a feverish, furtive glance towards the door. He almost dropped, at one time, as a postman crossed from the opposite side of the street, as if to enter their shop—then passing on immediately, however, to the next door. Not a person, in short, entered the premises, that he did not scrutinize narrowly and anxiously, but in vain. No—buying and selling was the order of the day, as usual! Eleven o'clock struck, and he sighed. "You don't seem well," said a pretty young woman, to whom, in a somewhat absent manner, he was exhibiting and describing the qualities of some cambric. "Oh—ye—es, uncommon!" he replied; "never better, ma'am, than when so well employed!" accompanying the latter words with what he conceived to be a very arch, but which was, in fact, a very impudent, look at his fair customer. At that moment a voice called out to him from the further end of the shop, near the door—"Titmouse! Wanted!"

"Coming!" he shouted, turning as white as the cambric he held in his hands—which became suddenly cold; while his heart went thump, thump, as he hastily exclaimed to the astonished lady, "Excuse me, ma'am, if you please—Jones," addressing the shopman next him, "will you attend to this lady?" and he hastened whither he had been called, amidst a prevalent grin and "hem!" from his companions on each side, as he passed along the shop, till he reached the spot where stood the stranger who had inquired for him. He was of a slight and gentlemanly figure, above the average height. His countenance was very striking: he was dressed with simplicity—somewhat carelessly perhaps; and appeared somewhere about thirty-six or thirty-seven years of age. He bowed slightly as Titmouse approached him, and an air of very serious surprise came over his expressive countenance.

"Mr. Titmouse?" he inquired, blandly. "Ye-e-s, sir, at your service," replied Titmouse, trembling involuntarily all over. The stranger again slightly inclined towards him, and—still more slightly—touched his hat; fixing on him, at the same time, an inquisitive penetrating eye, that really abashed, or rather perhaps alarmed him.

"You left—you favoured us by leaving—a note at our office last night, addressed to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap?" he inquired, lowering his voice to a whisper. "Yes, sir, hoping it was no——"

"Pray, Mr. Titmouse, can we be alone for about five or ten minutes?" "I—I—don't exactly know, *here*, sir; I'm afraid—against the rules of the house—but—I'll ask. Here *is* Mr. Tag-rag. May I step into the cloak-room with this gentleman for a few minutes, sir?" he continued, addressing his imperious employer, who with a pen behind his right ear, his left hand in his breeches pocket, and his right hand impatiently tweedling about his watch seals, had followed Titmouse, on hearing him inquired for in the manner I have described, and stood at a yard or two's distance, eyeing the two with a fussy dissatisfied look, wondering what on earth any one *could* want with one of his young men.

As Mr. Tag-rag will figure a little on my canvas by-and-by, I may as well here give the reader a slight sketch of that gentleman. He was about fifty-two years old ; a great tyrant in his little way ; a compound of ignorance, selfishness, and conceit. He knew nothing on earth except the price of his goods, and how to make the most of his business. He was of middle size, with a tendency to corpulence ; and almost invariably wore a black coat and waistcoat, a white neck-handkerchief very primly tied, and grey trousers. He had a dull, grey eye, with white eyelashes, and no eyebrows ; a forehead that seemed ashamed of his face, it retreated so far and so abruptly back from it ; his face was pretty deeply pitted with the small-pox ; his nose—or rather semblance of a nose—consisted of two great nostrils looking at you—as it were, impudently—out of the middle of his face ; there was a perfect level space from cheekbone to cheekbone ; his whiskers, neatly and closely cut, came in points to each corner of his mouth, which was a very large, shapeless, sensual-looking affair. This may serve, for the present, to give you an idea of the man who had contrived to excite towards himself the hatred and contempt of everybody over whom he had any control.

"You know quite well, sir, we never allow anything of the sort," was his short reply, in a very disagreeable tone and manner, to the modest request of Titmouse, as above mentioned.

"May I beg the favour of a few minutes' private conversation with Mr. Titmouse," said the stranger, politely, "on a matter of the last importance to him ? My name, sir, is Gammon, and I am a solicitor."

"Why, sir," answered Tag-rag, somewhat cowed by the calm and gentlemanly, but at the same time decisive manner of Mr. Gammon, "it's really very inconvenient, and decidedly against the rules of the house, for any of my young men to be absent on business of their own during *my* business-hours ; but—I suppose—what must be must be—I'll give him ten minutes—and he'd better not stay longer," he subjoined fiercely—looking significantly first at his watch, and then at Titmouse. "It's only for the sake of the other young men, sir. In a large establishment like ours, we're obliged, you know, sir," etc., etc., etc., he added, in a low cringing tone, deprecatory of the contemptuous air with which he *felt* that Mr. Gammon was regarding him. That gentleman, with a slight bow, and a sarcastic smile, presently quitted the shop, accompanied by Titmouse, who scarce knew whether his head or heels were uppermost.

"How far do you live from this place, Mr. Titmouse ?" inquired Mr. Gammon, as soon as they had got into the street. "Not four minutes' walk, sir ; but—hem !" —he was flustered at the idea of showing so eminent a person into his wretched room—"suppose we were to step into this tavern here, sir—I daresay they've a room at our service——" "Pray, allow me to ask, Mr. Titmouse,—have you any private papers—family writings, or things of that sort, at your rooms ?" Titmouse seemed considering. "I—I think I have, sir," he replied—"one or two, but they're of no consequence." "Are you a *judge* on that point, Mr. Titmouse ?" inquired Mr. Gammon, with a smile ; "pray let us, my dear sir, at once to your rooms—time is very short and valuable. I should vastly like to look at these same insignificant papers of yours !"

In less than two minutes' further time, Mr. Gammon was sitting at Titmouse's little rickety round table, at his lodgings, with a sheet of paper before him, and a small pencil-case in his hand, asking him a number of questions concerning his birth and family connections, and taking down his answers very carefully. Mr. Titmouse was surprised at the gentleman's knowledge of the family history of the Titmouses. As for papers, etc., Mr. Titmouse succeeded in producing four or five old letters and memoranda from the bottom of his trunk, and one or two entries, in faded ink, on the fly-leaf of a Bible of his father's which he did not recollect having opened before for very many years,

and of which said entries, till pressed on the subject by Mr. Gammon, he had been hardly aware of even the existence. With these several documents Mr. Gammon was so much struck that he proposed to take them away with him, for better and more leisurely examination, and safer custody, at their office; but Mr. Titmouse significantly hinted at his very recent acquaintance with Mr. Gammon, who, he intimated, was at liberty to come and make exact copies of them whenever he pleased, in his (Mr. Titmouse's) presence.

"Oh, certainly—yes," replied Mr. Gammon, slightly colouring at the distrust implied by this observation; "I applaud your caution, Mr. Titmouse. By all means keep them, and most carefully, because (I do not say that they are), but it is quite possible that they may become rather valuable—to *you*."

"Thank you, sir: and now, hoping you'll excuse the liberty," said Titmouse, with a very anxious air, "I should most uncommonly like to know what all this means—what is to turn up out of it all?" "The law, my dear sir, is proverbially uncertain——" "Oh, Lord! but the law can give me a *hint*——" "*The law never hints*," interrupted Mr. Gammon impressively, with a bland smile. "Well then, how did you come sir, to know that there ever was such a person as Mr. Gabriel Titmouse, my father? And what, can come from him, seeing he was only a bit of a shoemaker—unless he's *heir* to something?" "Ah, yes—exactly; those are very interesting questions, Mr. Titmouse—very——" "Yes, sir; and them and a great many more I was going to ask long ago, but I saw you were ——" "Sir, I perceive that we have positively been absent from your place of business nearly an hour—your employers will be getting rather impatient."

"Meaning no offence, sir—bother *their* impatience! *I'm* impatient, I assure you, to know what all this means. Come, sir, 'pon my life I've told *you* everything! It isn't quite fair!"

"Why, certainly, you see, Mr. Titmouse," said Gammon, with an agreeable smile (it was that smile of his that had been the making of Mr. Gammon), "it is only candid in me to acknowledge that your curiosity is perfectly reasonable, and your frankness very obliging; and I see no difficulty in admitting at once, that *I have* had a motive——" "Yes sir—and all that—I know, sir," hastily interrupted Titmouse, but without irritating or disturbing the placid speaker. "And that we waited with some anxiety for the result of our advertisement." "Ah, you can't escape from *that*, you know, sir!" interposed Titmouse, with a confident air. "But it is a maxim with us, my dear sir, never to be premature in anything, especially when it may be—very prejudicial; you've really no idea, my dear Mr. Titmouse, of the world of mischief that is often done by precipitancy in legal matters; and in the present stage of the business—the present stage, my dear sir—I really do see it necessary not to—do anything premature, and without consulting my partners."

"Lord, sir!" exclaimed Titmouse, getting more and more irritated and impatient as he reflected on the length of his absence from Tag-rag and Co.'s. "I quite feel for your anxiety—so perfectly natural——" "Oh, dear sir! if you'd only tell me the *least bit*——" "If, my dear sir, I were to disclose just now the exact object we had in inserting that advertisement in the papers——" "How did you come to know of it at all, sir? Come, there can't be any harm in *that* anyhow——" "Not in the least, my dear sir. It was in the course of business—in the course of business." "Is it money that's been left me—or—anything of that sort?"

"It quite pains me, I assure you, Mr. Titmouse—I think, by the way"—added Gammon suddenly, as something occurred to him of their previous conversation, which he was not quite sure of—"you told me that that Bible was given you by your father." "Oh yes, sir! yes—no doubt of it; surely *that* can't signify seeing he's dead, and I'm his only son?" asked Titmouse, quickly and eagerly.

"Oh, 'tis only a circumstance—a mere circumstance; but in business, you know, Mr. Titmouse, every little helps—and you really, by the way, have no recollection of your mother, Mr. Titmouse?" "No, sir, I said so! And—meaning no offence, sir—I can't abide being put off in this kind of way, I must own! See what I have told you—you've told *me* nothing at all. I hope you haven't been only making me a cat's-paw of? 'pon my soul, I *hate* being made a cat's-paw of, sir!" "Good heavens, Mr. Titmouse! how can you imagine it? You are at this moment the object of a considerable share of our anxiety——" "Not meaning it rudely, sir—please to tell me at once, plainly, am I to be the better for anything you're now about?" "That may or may not be, sir," answered Mr. Gammon, in the same imperturbable manner, drawing on his gloves, and rising from his chair. "In justice to yourself, and other parties concerned——" "Oh! is anybody to *share* in it?" exclaimed Titmouse, alarmedly. "I am sure," said Gammon, smiling, "that you will give us credit for consulting your best interests. We sincerely desire to advance them; and this matter occupies a great deal of our time and anxiety. It—it is *really*," looking at his watch, "upwards of an hour since we quitted your place of business—I fear I shall get into disgrace with that respectable gentleman your employer. Will you favour us with a call at our office to-morrow night, when the business of the day is over? When do you quit at night?" "About half-past nine o'clock, sir; but really—to-morrow night! Couldn't I come to-night, sir?" "Not to-night, I fear, my dear sir. We have a very important engagement. Let us say to-morrow night, at a quarter past ten—shall we say that hour?" "Well, sir, if not before—yes—I'll be with you. But I *must* say——" "Good-day, Mr. Titmouse." They were by this time in Oxford Street again. "Good-day, my dear sir—good-day—to-morrow night, as soon after ten as possible—eh! Good-bye."

This was all that Mr. Titmouse could get out of Mr. Gammon, who, hailing a coach off the stand beside them, got into it, and it was soon making its way eastward. What a miserable mixture of doubts, hopes, and fears, had he left Titmouse! He felt as if he were like a squeezed orange; he had told everything he knew about himself, and got nothing in return out of the smooth, imperturbable, impenetrable Mr. Gammon, but empty civilities—"Lord, Lord!" thought Titmouse, as Mr. Gammon's coach turned the corner; "what would I give to know half about it that that gent knows! But Mr. Tag-rag! by Jove! what *will* he say? It's struck twelve. I've been more than an hour away—and he gave me ten minutes! Sha'n't I catch it?"

And he did. Almost the very first person he met, on entering the shop, was his respected employer, Mr. Tag-rag, who, plucking his watch out of his fob, and, looking furiously at it, motioned the trembling Titmouse to follow him to the further end of the long shop, where there happened to be then no customers. "Is this your ten minutes, sir, eh?" "I am sorry——" "Where may you have been, sir, all this while?" "With that gentleman, sir, and I really did not know——" "You didn't know, sir! Who cares what you know? You know you ought to have been back fifty-five minutes ago, sir. You do, sir! Isn't your time my property, sir? Don't I pay for it, sir? An hour!—in the middle of the day! I've not had such a thing happen this five years! I'll stop it out of your salary, sir." Titmouse did not attempt to interrupt him. "And pray what have you been gossiping about, sir, in this disgraceful manner?" "Something that he wanted to say to me, sir." "You low puppy!—do you suppose I don't see your impertinence? I *insist*, sir, on knowing what all this gossiping with that fellow has been about?" "Then you *won't* know, sir, that's flat!" replied Titmouse doggedly; returning to his usual station behind the counter. "I sha'n't!" "No, sir, you sha'n't know a single word about it." "Sha'n't know a single word about it! Vastly good, sir! Do you know

whom you're talking to, sir? Do you really know in whose presence you are, sir?" "Mr. Tag-rag, I presume, of the firm of Tag-rag and Co.," replied Titmouse, looking him full in the face. One or two of his companions near him almost turned pale at the audacity he was displaying. "And who are *you*, sir, that dare to presume to bandy words with ME, sir?" inquired Tag-rag, his deeply pitted face having gone quite white, and his whole body quivering with rage. "Tittlebat Titmouse, at your service," was the answer in a glib tone, and with a sufficiently saucy air. "You heard that, I hope?" inquired Tag-rag, with forced calmness, of a pale-faced young man, the nearest to him. "Ye—es, sir," was the meekly reluctant answer. "This day month you leave, sir!" said Mr. Tag-rag solemnly—as if conscious that he was passing a sort of sentence of death upon the presumptuous delinquent. "Very well, Mr. Tag-rag—anything that pleases you pleases your humble servant. I *will* go this day month, and welcome—I've long wished——" "Then you *sha'n't* leave, sir," said Tag-rag, furiously. "But I will, sir. You've given me warning; and, if you haven't now, I give *you* warning," replied Titmouse; turning, however, very pale, and experiencing a certain sudden sinking of the heart—for this was a serious and most unlooked-for event, and for a while put out of his head all the agitating thoughts of the last few hours. Poor Titmouse had enough to bear—what with the delicate raillery and banter of his accomplished companions for the rest of the day, and the galling tyranny of Mr. Tag-rag (who dogged him about all day, setting him about the most menial and troublesome offices he could, and constantly saying mortifying things to him before customers), and the state of miserable suspense in which Mr. Gammon had thought fit to leave him; I say that surely all this was enough for him to bear without having to encounter at night, as he did, on his return to his lodgings, his blustering landlady, who vowed that if she sold him out and out she would be put off no longer—and his pertinacious and melancholy tailor, who, with sallow unshaven face, told him of five children at home, all ill of the small-pox, and his wife in an hospital—and he *implored* a payment on account. This sufferer succeeded in squeezing out of Titmouse seven shillings on account, and his landlady extorted ten; which staved off a distress—direful word!—for some week or two longer; and so they left him in possession of eight shillings or so, to last till next quarter-day. He sighed heavily, barred his door, and sat down opposite his little table, on which was nothing but a solitary thin candle, and on which his eyes rested unconsciously till the stench of it, burning right down into the socket, roused him from his wretched reverie. Then he unlocked his box, and took out his Bible and the papers which had been produced to Mr. Gammon, and gazed at them with intense but useless scrutiny. Unable, however, to conjecture what bearing they could have upon himself or his fortunes, he hastily replaced them in his box, threw off his clothes, and flung himself on his bed, to pass a far more dismal night than he had known for years.

He ran the gauntlet at Messrs. Tag-rag and Co.'s all Tuesday as he had done on the day preceding. One should have supposed that when his companions beheld him persecuted by their common tyrant, whom they all equally hated, they would have made common cause with their suffering companion, or at all events given no countenance to his persecution; yet it was far otherwise. Without stopping to analyse the feeling which produced it (and which the moderately reflective reader may easily analyse for himself if so disposed), I am grieved to have to say, that when all the young men saw that Tag-rag would be gratified by their *cutting* poor Titmouse, who, with all his little vanities, fooleries, and even selfishness, had never personally offended or injured any of them—they did so; and, when Tag-rag observed it, his miserable mind was more gratified with them by far than it had ever been before. He spoke to all of them with unusual blandness; to the sinner, Titmouse, with augmented bitterness.

CHAPTER II.

A FEW minutes after ten o'clock that night, a gentle ringing at the bell of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's office, announced the arrival of poor Titmouse. The door was quickly opened by a very fashionably-dressed clerk, who seemed in the act of quitting for the night. "Ah—Mr. Titmouse, I presume?" he inquired, with a kind of deference in his manner that Titmouse had never been accustomed to. "The same, sir—Tittlebat Titmouse."

"Oh! allow me, sir, to show you in to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; I know they're expecting to see you. It's not often they're here so late! Walk in, sir——" With this he led the way to an inner room, and opening a green-baize door in the further side of it, announced and showed in Mr. Titmouse, and left him—sufficiently flustered. Three gentlemen were sitting at a large table, on which he saw, by the strong but circumscribed light of two shaded candlesticks, were lying a great number of papers and parchments. The three gentlemen rose when he entered, Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap involuntarily starting on first catching sight of the figure of Titmouse; Mr. Gammon came and shook hands with him.

"Mr. Titmouse," said he, with a very polite air, "let me introduce you to Mr. Quirk" (this was the senior partner, a short, stout, elderly gentleman, dressed in black, with a shining bald head and white hair, and sharp black eyes, and who looked very earnestly, nay, with even a kind of dismay, at him) "and Mr. Snap" (this was the junior partner, having recently been promoted to be such after ten years' service in the office, as managing clerk: he was about thirty, particularly well dressed, slight, active, and with a face like a terrier—so hard, sharp, and wiry). Of Mr. Gammon himself, I have already given the reader a slight notion. He appeared altogether a different style of person from both his partners. He was of most gentlemanly person and bearing—and at once acute, cautious, and insinuating—with a certain something about the eye, which had from the first made Titmouse feel uneasy on looking at him. Rising, and placing a chair for him, on which he sat down, they resuming theirs. "You are punctual, Mr. Titmouse!" exclaimed Mr. Gammon, with a smile; "more so than, I fear, you were yesterday, after our long interview, eh? Pray what did that worthy person, Mr. Rag-bag—or whatever his name is—say, on your return?" "Say, gents" (he tried to clear his throat, for he spoke somewhat more thickly, and his heart beat more perceptibly, than usual), "meaning no offence—I'm ruined by it, and no mistake." "Ruined! I'm sorry to hear it," interposed Mr. Gammon, with a concerned air. "I am, indeed, sir. Such a towering rage as he has been in ever since; and he's given me warning to go on the 10th of next month." He thought he observed a faint smile flit over the faces of all three. "He has, indeed?" "Dear me, Mr. Titmouse! Did he allege any reason for dismissing you?" keenly inquired Mr. Quirk. "Yes, sir——" "What might it have been?" "Stopping out longer than I was allowed, and refusing to tell him what this gentleman and I had been talking about." "Don't think that'll do; sure it won't?" briskly exclaimed Mr. Snap; "no just cause, that," and he jumped up, whisked down a book from the shelves behind him, and eagerly turned over the leaves.

"Never mind that now, Mr. Snap," said Mr. Quirk, rather petulantly; "surely we have other matters to talk about to-night." "Asking pardon, sir, but I think it *does* matter to me, sir," interposed Titmouse; "for on the 10th of next month I'm a beggar—being next door to it *now*." "Not quite, we trust," said Mr. Gammon, with a benignant smile. "But Mr. Tag-rag said he'd make me as good as one." "That's evidence to show malice," again eagerly interjected Mr. Snap, who was again tartly rebuffed by Mr. Quirk; even Mr. Gammon turning towards him with a surprised—"Really, Mr. Snap!"

"So Mr. Tag-rag said he'd make you a beggar?" inquired Mr. Quirk. "He vowed he would, sir! He did, as true as the gospel, sir!"

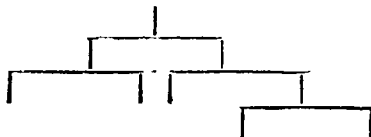
"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Quirk and Mr. Gammon—but such a laugh!—not careless or hearty, but subdued, and with a dash of deference in it. "Well—it perhaps may not signify much, by that time," said he, and laughed again, followed by the soft laugh of Mr. Gammon, and a kind of sharp, quick sound, like a bark, from Mr. Snap.

"But, gents, you'll excuse me if I say I think it *does* signify to *me*, and a'n't any laughing matter!" quoth Titmouse earnestly, and colouring with anger. "Without being rude, I'd rather come to business, if there's any to be done, without so much laughing at me."

"Laughing at you, my dear sir?—no, no!" exclaimed all three in a breath—"laughing *with* you," said Mr. Quirk! "By the time you mention, you may perhaps be able to laugh at Mr. Rag-bag, and everybody else, for—" ["No use mincing matters!" he whispered, in a low tone, to Mr. Gammon, who nodded in apparently reluctant acquiescence, and fixed his eyes earnestly on Titmouse.] "I really think we are warranted, sir, in preparing you to expect by that time—that is, you will understand, sir, if our efforts are successful in your behalf, and if you yield yourself implicitly in all things to our guidance—that is *absolutely essential*—a prospect—we say, at present, you will observe, *only* a prospect—of a surprising and splendid change in your circumstances!" Titmouse began to tremble violently, his heart beat rapidly, and his hands were bedewed with a cold moisture. "It's not impossible, sir, in plain English," continued Mr. Quirk, himself growing a little excited with the important communication that trembled on the tip of his tongue, "that you may at no distant time (if you turn out to be the person) be put into possession of an estate of somewhere about Ten Thousand a-year——"

The words seemed to have struck Titmouse blind—as he saw nothing for some moments; then everything seemed swimming around him, and he felt a sort of faintness or sickness stealing over him. They had hardly been prepared for their communications affecting their little visitor so powerfully. Mr. Snap hastened out, and in with a glass of water; and the earnest attentions of the three soon restored Mr. Titmouse to his senses. It was a good while, however, before he could appreciate the little conversation which they now and then addressed to him, or estimate the full importance of the astounding intelligence Mr. Quirk had just communicated, "Beg pardon—but may I make free to ask for a little brandy-and-water, gents? I feel all over in a kind of tremble," said he, some time afterwards.

"Yes—by all means, Mr. Titmouse. Mr. Snap, will you be kind enough to order Betty to bring in a glass of cold brandy-and-water from the Jolly Thieves, next door?" Snap shot out, gave the order, and returned in a trice. The old woman in a few minutes' time followed, with a large tumbler of dark brandy-and-water, quite hot, for which Mr. Gammon apologized, but Mr. Titmouse said he preferred it so—and soon addressed himself to the inspiring mixture. It quickly manifested its influence, reassuring him wonderfully. As he sat sipping it, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap being engaged in an earnest conversation, of which he could understand little or nothing, he had leisure to look about him, and observed that there was lying before them a large sheet of paper, at which they all of them often and earnestly looked, filled with marks, so—



with writing at the ends of each of them, and round and square figures. When he saw them all bending over and scrutinizing this mysterious object, it puzzled him (and many a better head than his has a pedigree puzzled before) sorely, and he began to suspect it was a kind of conjuring paper!

"I hope, gents, that paper's all right—eh?" said he, supported by the brandy, which he had nearly finished. They turned towards him with a smile of momentary surprise, and then—"We hope so—a vast deal depends on it," said Mr. Quirk, looking over his glasses at Titmouse. Now what *he* had hinted at, as far as he could venture to do so, was a thought that glanced across his as yet unsettled brain, that there might have been invoked more than *mere earthly assistance*; but he prudently pressed the matter no farther—that was all Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's look out: *he* had been no party to anything of the sort, nor would he knowingly. He also observed the same sheets of paper written all over, which Mr. Gammon had filled at his (Titmouse's) room, the night before; and several new and old-looking papers and parchments. Sometimes they addressed questions to him, but found it somewhat difficult to keep his attention up to anything that was said to him for the wild visions that were chasing one another through his heated brain; the passage of which said visions was not a little accelerated by the large tumbler of brandy-and-water which he had just taken.

"Then, in fact," said Mr. Quirk, as the three simultaneously sat down, after having been for some time standing poring over the paper before Mr. Quirk, "Tittebat's title accrued in 18—? That's the point—eh, Gammon?"

"Precisely so," said Mr. Gammon calmly.

"To be sure," confidently added Snap; who having devoted himself exclusively all his life to the sharpest practice of the criminal law, knew about as much of real property law as a snipe—but it would not do to appear ignorant, or taking no part in the matter, in the presence of the heir-at-law, and the future great client of the house.

"Well, Mr. Titmouse," at length said Mr. Quirk, laying aside his glasses, "you are likely to be one of the luckiest men of your day! We may be mistaken, but it appears to us that your right is clear, and has been clear these ten or twelve years, to the immediate enjoyment of a very fine estate in Yorkshire worth some £10,000 or £12,000 year at the least!" "You don't say so! Oh, gents! I do believe we are all dreaming; is it all true, indeed?" "It is, Mr. Titmouse—and we are very proud and happy indeed to be the honoured instruments of establishing your rights, my dear sir," said Mr. Gammon. "Then all the money that's been spent this ten or twelve years is my money, is it?" "If we are right it is undoubtedly as you say," answered Mr. Quirk, giving a quick apprehensive glance at Mr. Gammon. "There'll be a jolly reckoning for some one, then, shortly—eh? My stars!"

"My dear Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Gammon, "you have a most just regard for your own interests; there *will* be a reckoning, and a very terrible one ere long, for somebody—but we've time enough before us for all that! Only let us have the unspeakable happiness of seeing you once fairly in possession of your estates, and our office shall know no rest till you have got all you are entitled to—every farthing even!"

"Oh, never fear our letting them rest!" said Mr. Quirk, judiciously accommodating himself to the taste and apprehension of his excited auditor. "Those that must give up the goose must give up the giblets also—ha, ha, ha!" Messrs. Gammon and Snap echoed the laugh, and enjoyed the joke of the head of the firm.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Titmouse, immensely excited by the conjoint influence of the brandy and the news of the night; "capital! capital! hurrah! Such goings on there will be! You're all of the right sort, gents, I see! 'Pon

my life, law for ever! Let's all shake hands, gents! Come, if you please, all together; all friends to night!" And the little fellow grasped each of the three readily-proffered right hands of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, with an energy that was likely to make all the high contracting parties to that quadruple alliance remember its ratification.

"And is it all a ready-money affair, gents—or rent, and all *that* kind of thing?" "Why, almost entirely the latter," answered Mr. Quirk, "except the accumulations." "Then, 'pon my soul—I'm a great landlord, am I?"

"Indeed, my dear Mr. Titmouse, you are (that is, unless we have made a blunder such as our house is not often in the habit of making), and have two very fine houses, one in town and the other in the country." "Capital! delightful! I'll live in both of them—we'll have *such* goings on! And is it *quite* up to the mark of £10,000 a-year?" "We really entertain no doubt—" "And such as I can spend all of it, every year?" "Certainly—no doubt of it—not the least. The rents are paid with most exemplary punctuality—at least," added Mr. Gammon, with a captivating, an irresistible smile, and taking him affectionately by the hand—"at least they *will* be, as soon as we have them fairly in our management." "Oh, *you're* to get it all in for me, are you?" he inquired briskly. The three partners bowed, with the most deprecatingly disinterested air in the world, intimating that, for *his* sake they were ready to take upon themselves, even that troublesome responsibility.

"Capital! couldn't be better! couldn't be better! Ha, ha, ha—you've caught the goose, and must bring me the eggs. Ha, ha, ha! a touch in *your* line, old gents!"

"Ha, ha, ha! excellent? Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the three partners at the wit of their new client. Mr. Titmouse joined them, and snapped his fingers in the air.

"Lord—I've just thought of Tag-rag and Company's—I seem as if I hadn't seen or heard of those gents for Lord knows how long! Only fancy old Tag-rag making me a beggar on the 10th of next month—ha, ha, ha! I sha'n't see that infernal hole any more, anyhow!"

"[*There!*" whispered Mr. Gammon, apprehensively, in the ear of Mr. Quirk, "you hear that? A little wretch! We have been perfectly insane in going so far already with him! Is not this what I predicted?" "I don't care," said Mr. Quirk stubbornly. "Who first found it out, Mr. Gammon? and who's to be at the expense and responsibility? Pshaw! I know what I'm about—I'll make him knuckle down—never fear me!"]

"*That,*" snapping his fingers, "for Mr. Tag-rag! *That* for Mother Squallop—" "Ah, ah, gents! It won't do to go back to that—eugh!—eh? will it?—you know what I mean! Fancy Tittlebat Titmouse standing behind——"

The partners looked rather blank.

"We would venture to suggest, Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Gammon seriously, "the *absolute necessity* there is for everything on your part and our parts to go on as quietly as before, for a little time to come: to be safe and successful, my dear sir, we must be *secret*." "Oh, I see gents! I see; mum—mum's the word, for the present! but I *must* say, if there is any one whom I want to hear of it, sooner than another it's——" "Rag-bag and Co., I suppose! ha, ha, ha!" interrupted Mr. Gammon, his partners echoing his gentle laugh.

"Ha ha, ha! Cuss the cats—that's it—ha, ha, ha!" echoed Mr. Titmouse; who, getting up out of his chair, could not resist capering too and fro in something of the attitude of a stage-dancer, whistling and humming by turns, and indulging in various other wild antics.

"And now, gents—excuse me, but, to do a bit of business—when am I to *begin* scattering the shiners, eh?" he inquired, interrupting a low-toned, but somewhat vehement conversation, between the two senior partners.

"Oh, of course, sir," replied Mr. Gammon, rather coldly, "some delay is unavoidable. All we have done, as yet, is to discover that, as far as we are advised, and can judge, you will turn out to be the right owner; but very extensive and expensive operations must be immediately commenced, before you can be put into possession. There are some who won't be persuaded to drop £10,000 a-year out of their hands, Mr. Titmouse, for the mere asking!" added Mr. Gammon with a bitter smile.

"The devil there are! *Who* are they that want to keep me any longer out of what's my own?—what's justly mine? Eh? I want to know! Haven't they kept me out long enough?—hang 'em! Put 'em in prison directly—don't spare 'em—rascals;"

"They'll probably, ere long, find their way in that direction—for, however," replied Mr. Quirk, "he's to make up, poor devil, the mesne profits—"

"*Mean* profits?—is that all you call them, gents! 'Pon my life, it's rogue's money—villain's profits? So don't spare him—he's robbed the fatherless, which I am, and an orphan. Keep me out of what's mine, indeed! Curse me if he shall, though!"

"My dear Mr. Titmouse," said Gammon gravely, "we are getting on too fast—dreadfully too fast. It will never do: matters of such immense importance as these cannot be hurried on, or talked of, in this way—" "I like that sir!—I do by Jove!" "You will really, if you go on in this wild way, Mr. Titmouse, make us regret the trouble we have taken in the affair, and especially the promptness with which we have communicated to you the extent of your possible good fortune."

"Beg pardon, I'm sure, gents, but mean no offence: am monstrous obliged to you for what you've done for me—but, by Jove, it's taken me rather a-back, I own, to hear that I'm to be kept so long out of it all! Why can't you offer him, whoever he is that has my property, a slapping sum to go out at once? Gents, I'll own to you I'm most uncommon low—never so low in my life—devilish low? Done up, and yet can't get what's justly mine! What am I to do in the meanwhile? consider *that*, gents!"

"You are rather excited just now, Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Quirk seriously; "suppose we now break up, and resume our conversation to-morrow, when we are all in better and calmer trim?"

"No, sir, thanking you all the same; but I think we'd better go on with it now," replied Titmouse impetuously. "Do you think I can stoop to go back to that nasty, beastly shop and stand behind the counter?" "Our *decided* opinion, Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Quirk, emphatically—his other partners getting very grave in their looks—"that is, if our opinion is worth offering—"

"That, by Jove! remains to be seen," said Titmouse, with a pettish shake of the head.

"Well, such as it is, we offer it you; and it is, that for many reasons you continue, for a little while longer, in your present situation—" "What! own Tag-rag for my master—and I worth £10,000 a-year?"

"My dear sir, you've not got it yet," said Mr. Quirk with a very bitter sarcastic smile.

"Do you think you'd have told me what you have, if you weren't sure that I *should*, though? No, no! you've gone too far, by Jove!—I shall burst, I shall! Me to go on as before!—they use me worse and worse every day. Gents, you'll excuse me—I hope you will; but business is business, gents—it is; and if you won't do mine, I must look out for them that will—'pon my soul, I must, and—" If Mr. Titmouse could have seen, or having seen, appreciated the looks which the three partners interchanged, on hearing this absurd, ungrateful, and insolent speech of his—the expression that flitted across their shrewd faces; that was, of intense contempt for him, hardly over-mastered and

concealed by a vivid perception of their own interest, which was, of course, to *manage*, to soothe, to conciliate him!

How the reptile propensities of his mean nature had thriven beneath the sudden sunshine of unexpected prosperity!—See already his selfishness, truculence, rapacity, in full play!

“So, gents,” said he after a long and keen expostulation with them on the same subject, “I’m really to go to-morrow morning to Rag-tag and Co’s, and go on with the cursed life I led there to day, all as if nothing had happened,—ha, ha, ha!—I like that!”

“In your present humour, Mr. Titmouse, it would be in vain to discuss the matter,” said Mr. Quirk. “Again I tell you that the course we have recommended is, in our opinion, the proper one; excuse me if I add, that you are entirely in our hands—and if I ask you—what *can* you do but adopt our advice?”

“Why hang me if I won’t employ somebody else—that’s flat! S’elp me heaven, I will! So, good-night, gents; you’ll find that Tittlebat Titmouse isn’t to be trifled with!” So saying, Mr. Titmouse clapped his hat on his head, bounced out of the room, and, no attempt being made to stop him, he was in the street in a twinkling.

Mr. Gammon gazed at Mr. Quirk with a look whose significance the old gentleman thoroughly understood—’twas compounded of triumph, reproach, and apprehension.

“Did you ever see such a little beast!” exclaimed Mr. Quirk, with an air of disgust, turning to Mr. Snap. “Beggar on horseback!” exclaimed Snap, with a bitter sneer. “It won’t do, however,” said Mr. Quirk, with a most chagrined and apprehensive air, “for him to go at large in his present frame of mind—he may ruin the thing altogether——” “As good as £500 a-year out of the way of the office,” said Snap. “It cannot be helped *now*,” said Mr. Gammon, with a sigh of vexation, turning to Mr. Quirk, and seizing his hat—“he must be managed—so I’ll go after him instantly, and bring him back at all hazards; and we must really try and do something for him in the meanwhile, to keep him quiet till the thing’s brought a little into train.” So out went after Titmouse, Mr. Gammon, from whose lips dropped persuasion sweeter than honey; and I should not be surprised if he were to be able to bring back that little stubborn piece of conceited stupidity.

As soon as Mr. Titmouse heard the street door shut after him, with a kind of bang, he snapped his fingers once or twice, by way of letting off a little of the inflammable air that was in him, and muttered, “Pretty chaps those, upon my soul! I’ll expose them all! I’ll apply to the lord mayor—they’re a pack of swindlers, they are! This is the way they treat *me*, who’ve got a title of £10,000 a-year! To be sure!”—He stood still for a moment, and another moment, and dismay came quickly over him; for it suddenly occurred to his partially obfuscated intellect—what *hold* had he got on Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap?—what *could* he do?—what *HAD* he done?

Ah—the golden vision of the last few hours was fading away momentarily, like a dream! Each second of his deep and rapid reflection, rendered more impetuous his desire and determination to return and make his peace with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. By submission for the present, he could get the whip-hand of them hereafter! He was in the act of turning round towards the office, when Mr. Gammon softly laid his hand upon the shoulder of his repentant client.

“Mr. Titmouse! my dear sir, what is the matter with you? How could we so misunderstand each other?”

Titmouse’s small cunning was on the *qui vive*, and he saw and followed up his advantage. “I am going,” said he, in a resolute tone, “to speak to some

one else, in the morning." "Ah, to be sure—I supposed as much—'tis a matter which of course, however, signifies nothing to any one but yourself. You will take any steps, my dear sir, that occur to you, and act as you may be advised." "Monstrous kind of you, 'pon my life! to come and give me such good advice!" exclaimed Titmouse with a sneer. "Oh, don't mention it!" said Gammon coolly; "I came out of pure good nature, to assure you that our office, notwithstanding what has passed, entertains not the slightest personal ill feeling towards you, in thus throwing off our hands a fearfully expensive, and most harassing enterprise—which we had too rashly undertaken—" "Hem!" exclaimed Titmouse, once or twice. "So good-night, Mr. Titmouse—good-night! God bless you! we part friends!" Mr. Gammon, in the act of returning to the door, extended his hand to Mr. Titmouse, who he instantly perceived was melting rapidly.

"Why, sir," quoth Titmouse, with a mixture of embarrassment and alarm, "if I thought you all meant the correct thing—hem! I say, the correct thing by me—I shouldn't so much mind a little disappointment for the time; but you must own, Mr. Gammon, it is very hard being kept out of one's own so long—honour, now! isn't it!"

"True, very true, Mr. Titmouse. Very hard it is, indeed, to bear, and we all felt deeply for you, and would have set everything in train—" "*Would have—*" "Yes, my dear Mr. Titmouse, we *would* have done it, and brought you through every difficulty—over every obstacle, prodigious though they are, and almost innumerable." "Why—you—don't—hardly—quite—mean to say you've given it all up?—What, already! 'Pon my life! Oh Lord!" exclaimed Titmouse, in evident trepidation.

Mr. Gammon had triumphed over Mr. Titmouse! whom, nothing loath, he brought back, in two minutes' time, into the room which Titmouse had just before so rudely quitted. Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap had now *their* parts to perform in the little scene which they had determined on enacting. They were in the act of locking up desks and drawers, evidently on the move; and received Mr. Titmouse with an air of cold surprise.

"Mr. Titmouse again!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk, taking his gloves out of his hat. "Back again!—an unexpected honour." "Leave anything behind?" inquired Mr. Snap—"don't see anything—" "Oh no, sir! No, sir!" exclaimed Titmouse, with eager anxiety. "This gent, Mr. Gammon, and I, have made it all up, gents! I'm not vexed any more—not the least, 'pon my soul I'm not." "*Vexed*, Mr. Titmouse!" echoed Mr. Quirk, with an air sternly ironical. "We are under great obligations to you for your forbearance!" "Oh, come, gents!" said Titmouse, more and more disturbed, "I *was* too warm, I dare say, and—and—I ask your pardon, all of you, gents! I won't say another word, if you'll but buckle to business again—quite exactly in your own way—because you see —"

"It's growing *very* late," said Mr. Quirk coldly, and looking at his watch; "however, after what you have said, probably at some future time, when we've leisure to look into the thing—" Poor Titmouse was ready to drop on his knees, in mingled agony and fright.

"May I be allowed to say," interposed the bland voice of Mr. Gammon, addressing himself to Mr. Quirk, "that Mr. Titmouse a few minutes ago assured me, outside there, that if you, as the head of the firm, could only be persuaded to let our house take up his case again—" "I did—I did indeed, gents! so help me—" interrupted Mr. Titmouse, eagerly backing with an oath the ready lie of Mr. Gammon.

Mr. Quirk drew his hand across his chin musingly, and stood silently for a few moments, evidently irresolute. "Well," said he at length, but in a very cool way, "since that is so, probably we may be induced to resume our heavy

labours in your behalf ; and if you will favour us with a call to-morrow night, at the same hour, we may have, by that time, made up our minds as to the course we shall think fit to adopt." "Lord, sir, I'll be here as the clock strikes, and as meek as a mouse ; and pray, have it all your own way for the future, gents—do !" "Good-night, sir—good-night !" exclaimed the partners, motioning towards the door.

"Good-night, gents !" said Titmouse, bowing very low, and feeling himself at the same time being bowed out !

Closet Court had never looked so odious to him as it did on his return from this memorable interview. Dreadfully distressed and harassed, he flung himself on his bed for a moment, directly he had shut his door, intending presently to rise and undress ; but Sleep, having got him prostrate, secured her victory. She waved her black wand over him, and—he woke not till eight o'clock in the morning. A second long-drawn sigh was preparing to follow its predecessor, when he heard the clock strike eight, and sprung off the bed in a fright ; for he ought to have been at the shop an hour before. Dashing a little water into his face, and scarce staying to wipe it off, he ran down-stairs, through the court, and along the street, never stopping till he had found his way into—almost the very arms of the dreaded Mr. Tag-rag ; who, rarely making his appearance till about half-past nine, had, as the deuce would have it, happened to come down an hour and a half earlier than usual, on the only morning out of several hundreds on which Titmouse had been more than ten minutes beyond his time.

"Yours ve-ry respectfully, Mr. Titmouse—Thomas Tag-rag !" exclaimed that personage with mock solemnity, bowing formally to his astounded and breathless shopman. "I—I—beg your pardon, sir ; but I wasn't very well, and overslept myself," stammered Titmouse. "Nev-er mind, Mr. Titmouse ! nev-er mind !—it don't much signify, as it happens," interrupted Mr. Tag-rag bitterly ; "you've just got an hour and a half to take this piece of silk, with my compliments, to Messrs. Shuttle and Weaver, in Dirt Street, Spitalfields, and ask them if they aren't ashamed to send it to a West-end house like mine ; and bring back a better piece instead of it ! D'ye hear, sir ?" "Yes, sir—but—am I to go before my breakfast, sir ?" "Did I say a word about breakfast, sir ? You heard my orders, sir ; you can attend to them or not, Mr. Titmouse, as you please !"

Off trotted Titmouse *instantly*, without his breakfast ; and so Tag-rag gained one object he had had in view. Titmouse found this rather trying : a five-mile walk before him, with no inconsiderable load under his arm, having had nothing to eat since the preceding evening, when he had partaken of a delicate repast of thick slices of bread, smeared slightly over with salt butter, and moistened with a most astringent decoction of tea-leaves sweetened with brown sugar, and discoloured with sky-blue milk. As he went disconsolately along, so many doubts and fears buzzed impetuously about him, that they completely darkened his little soul, and bewildered his small understanding. *Ten Thousand a-Year !* it was never meant for the like of him. He soon worked himself into a conviction that the whole thing was infinitely too good to be true ; the affair was desperate ; it had been all moonshine ; for some cunning purpose or another, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, had been—ha, here he was within a few yards of their residence, the scene of last night's tragic transactions ! What could they be at ? They had been all very polite and friendly—and of their own seeking : had he affronted them ? How coldly and proudly they had parted with him overnight ! It was evident that they could stand no nonsense—they were great lawyers ; so he must eat humble pie cheerfully till he had got all that they had to give him. How he dreaded the coming night ! Perhaps they intended civilly to tell him that they would have nothing

more to do with him; they would get the estate for themselves, or some one else that would be more manageable! They had taken care to tell him nothing at all about the nature of his pretensions to this grand fortune. Oh, how crafty they were—they had it all their own way!—But what, after all, had he really done? The estates were his, if they were really in earnest—his, and no one's else; and why should he be kept out of them at their will and pleasure? Suppose he were to say he would give them all he was entitled to for £20,000 down, in cash? Oh no; on second thoughts, that would be only two years' income! Why was his mouth to be stopped—why might he not tell his shop-mates? What would he not give for the luxury of telling it to the odious Tag-rag? If he *were* to do so, Mr. Tag-rag, he was sure, would ask him to dinner the very next Sunday, at his country house at Clapham!—Thoughts such as these so occupied his mind, that he did not for a long time observe that he was walking at a rapid rate towards the Mile-end Road, having left Whitechapel church nearly half a mile behind him! The possible master of £10,000 a-year felt fit to drop with fatigue, and sudden apprehension of the storm he should have to encounter when he first saw Mr. Tag-rag after so long an absence. He was detained for a cruel length of time at Messrs. Shuttle and Weaver's, who not having the required quantity of silk at that moment on the premises, had some difficulty in obtaining it, after having sent for it to one or two neighbouring manufactories; by which means it came to pass that it was two o'clock before Titmouse, completely exhausted and dispirited, and reeking with perspiration, had reached Tag-rag and Company's. The gentlemen of the shop had finished their dinners.

"Go up-stairs and get your dinner, sir!" exclaimed Tag-rag imperiously, after having received Messrs. Shuttle and Weaver's message.

Titmouse having laid down his heavy bundle on the counter, went up-stairs hungry enough, and found himself the sole occupant of the long close-smelling room in which his companions had been recently dining. His dinner was presently brought to him by a slatternly slipshod servant-girl. It was in an uncovered basin, which appeared to contain nothing but the leavings of his companions—a savoury intermixture of cold potatoes, broken meat, (chiefly bits of fat and gristle,) a little hot water having been thrown over it to make it appear warm and fresh—(faugh!) His plate (with a small pinch of salt upon it) had not been cleaned after its recent use, but evidently only hastily smeared over with a greasy towel, as also seemed his knife and fork, which, in their disgusting state, he was fain to put up with, the table-cloth on which he might have wiped them having been removed. A hunch of bread that seemed to have been tossing about in the pan for days, and half-a-pint of flat-looking and sour-smelling table-beer, completed the fare set before him; opposite which he sat for some minutes, too much occupied with his reflections to commence his repast. He was in the act of scooping out of the basin some of its inviting contents, when—"Titmouse!" exclaimed the voice of one of his shopmates, peering in at him through the half-opened door, "Mr. Tag-rag wants you! He says you've had plenty of time to finish your dinner!" "Oh, tell him, then 'I'm only just beginning my dinner—eugh! such as it is,'" replied Titmouse, masticating the first mouthful with an appearance of no *particular* relish, it may be supposed.

In a few minutes' time Mr. Tag-rag himself entered the room, stuttering—"How much longer, sir, is it your pleasure to spend over your dinner, eh?" "Not another moment, sir," answered Titmouse, looking with ill-concealed disgust at the savoury victuals before him; "if you'll only allow me a few minutes to go home and buy a penny roll instead of all this—" "Ve—ry good, sir! Ve—ry parti—cu—larly good, Mr. Titmouse," replied Tag-rag, with ill-subdued fury; "anything else that I can make a *leetle* memorandum of against the day of your leaving us?"

This hint of two-fold terror, *i.e.*, of withholding the wretched balance of salary that might be due to him, on the ground of misconduct, and of also giving him a damning character, dispelled the small remains of Titmouse's appetite, and he rose to return to the shop, involuntarily clutching his fist as he brushed close past the tyrant Tag-rag on the stairs, whom he would have been delighted to pitch down head-foremost; and if he had done so, none of his fellow-slaves below, in spite of their present sycophancy towards Tag-rag, would have shown any particular alacrity in picking up their common oppressor. Poor Tittlebat resumed his old situation behind the counter; but how different his present from his former air and manner! With his pen occasionally peeping pertly out of his bushy hair over his right ear, and his yard measure in his hand, no one, till Monday morning, had been more cheerful, smirking, and nimble than Tittlebat Titmouse: alas, how crest-fallen now! None of his companions could make him out, or guess what was in the wind; so they very justly concluded that he had been doing something dreadfully disgraceful, the extent of which was known to Tag-rag and himself alone. Their jeers and banter were giving place to cold distrustful looks, that were much more trying to bear. How he longed to be able to burst upon their astounded minds with the pent-up intelligence that was silently racking and splitting his little bosom! But if he did—the terrible firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—Oh! the very thought of them glued his lips together. There was *one*, however, of whom he might surely make a confidant—the excellent Huckaback, with whom he had had no opportunity of communicating since Sunday night. That gentleman was as close a prisoner at the establishment of Diaper and Sarsenet, in Tottenham-court Road, as Titmouse at Messrs. Tag-rag's, of which said establishment he was as great an ornament as was Titmouse of that of Messrs. Tag-rag. They were about the same height, and equals in puppyism of manners, dress, and appearance; but Titmouse was much the better-looking. With equal conceit apparent in their faces, that of Huckaback, square, and flat, and sallow, had an expression of ineffable impudence, that made a lady shudder, and a gentleman feel a tingling sensation in his right toe. About his small black eyes there was a glimmer of low cunning;—but he is not of sufficient importance to be painted any further. When Titmouse left the shop that night, a little after nine, he hurried to his lodgings, to make himself as imposing in his appearance before Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, as his time and means would admit of. Behold, on a table lay a letter from Huckaback. It was written in a flourishing mercantile hand; and here is a copy of it:—

“DEAR TIT,—I hope you are well, which is what I can only middling say in respect of me. Such a row with my governors as I have had to-day! I thought that, as I had been in the House near upon Eighteen Months at £25 per annum, I might naturally ask for £30 a-year, (which is what my Predecessor had,) when, would you believe it, Mr. Sharpeye, (who is going to be taken in as a Partner,) to whom I named the thing, ris up in rage against me, and I were had up into the counting-house, where both the governors was, and they gave it me in such a way that you never saw nor heard of; but it wasn't all on their own side, as you know me too well to think of. You would have thought I had been a-going to rob the house. They said I was most oudacious, and all that, and ungrateful, and what would I have next? Mr. Diaper said times was come to such a pitch!! since when he was first in the business, for salaries, says he, is risen to double, and not half the work done that was, and no gratitude—(cursed old curmudgeon!) He said if I left them just now, I might whistle for a character, except one that I should not like; but if he don't mind I'll give him a touch of law about that—which brings me to what happened to-day with *our* lawyers, Titty, the people at Saffron Hill,

whom I thought I would call in on to-day being near the neighbourhood with some light goods, to see how affairs was getting on, and stir them up a bit——”

This almost took Titmouse's breath away——

—“feeling most *interested* on your account, as you know, dear Tit, I do. I said I wanted to speak to one of the gentlemen on business of vital importance ; whereat I was quickly shown into a room where two gents was sitting. Having put down my parcel for a minute on the table, I said I was a very intimate friend of yours, and had called in to see how things went on about the advertisement ; wherat you never saw in your life how struck they looked, and stared at one another in speechless silence, till they said to me, what concerned me about the business ? or something of that nature, but in such a way that *ris a rage* in me directly, all for your sake (for I did not like the looks of things ;) and says I, I said, we would let them know we were not to be *gammoned* ; wherat up rose the youngest of the two, and ringing the bell, he says to a tight-laced young gentleman with a pen behind his ear, ‘Show him to the door,’ which I was at once ; but, in doing so, let out a little of my mind to them. They’re no better than they should be, you see if they are ; but when we touch the property, we’ll show them who is their masters, which consoles me. Good-bye, keep your sperrits up, and I will call and tell you more about it on Sunday. So farewell (I write this at Mr. Sharpey’s desk, who is coming down from dinner directly.)—Your true friend,

“ R. HUCKABACK.

“ P.S.—Met a young Jew last night with a lot of prime cigars, and (knowing he *must* have stole them, they looked so good at the price), I bought one shilling’s worth for me, and two shillings’ worth for you, your salary being higher, and to say nothing of your chances.”

All that part of the foregoing letter which related to its amiable writer’s interview with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, Titmouse read in a kind of spasm—he could not draw a breath, and felt a choking sensation coming over him. After a while, “I may spare myself,” thought he, “the trouble of rigging out—Huckaback has done my business for me with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—mine will only be a walk in vain !” And this cursed call of Huckaback’s, too, to have happened after what had occurred last night between Titmouse and them ! ! and so urgently as he had been enjoined to keep the matter to himself ! Of course, Huckaback would seem to have been sent by him ; seeing he appeared to have assumed the hectoring tone which Titmouse had tried so vainly overnight, and now so bitterly repented of ; and he had no doubt grossly insulted the arbiters of Titmouse’s destiny (for he knew Huckaback’s impudence),—he had even said that he (Titmouse) would not be GAMMONED by them ! But time was pressing—the experiment must be made ; and with a beating heart he scrambled into a change of clothes—bottling up his wrath against the unconscious Huckaback till he should see that worthy. In a miserable state of mind he set off soon after for Saffron Hill at a quick space, which soon became a trot, and often sharpened into a downright run. He saw, heard, and thought of nothing, as he hurried along Oxford Street and Holborn, but Quirk, Gammon, Snap, and Huckaback, and the reception which the latter might have secured for him—if, indeed, he was to be received at all. The magical words, *Ten Thousand a-Year*, had not disappeared from the field of his troubled vision ; but how faintly and dimly they shone !—like the Pleiades coldly glistening through intervening mists far off—oh ! at what a stupendous, immeasurable, and hopeless distance ! Imagine those stars gazed at by the anguished and despairing eyes of the bereaved lover, madly believing

one of them to contain *her* who has just departed from his arms, and from this world, and you may form a notion of the agonizing feelings—the absorbed contemplation of one dear, dazzling, but distant object, experienced on this occasion by Mr. Titmouse. No, no; I don't mean seriously to pretend that so grand a thought as this *could* be entertained by his little optics intellectual; you might as well suppose the tiny eye of a black beetle to be scanning the vague, fanciful, and mysterious figure and proportions of Orion, or a chimpanzee to be pursuing and pondering over the immortal *Principia*. I repeat, that I have no desire of the sort, and am determined not again foolishly to attempt fine writing, which I now perceive to be entirely out of my line. In language more befitting me and my subject, I may be allowed to say that there is no getting the contents of a quart into a pint pot; that Titmouse's mind was a half-pint—and it was brimful. All the while that I have been going on thus, however, Titmouse was hurrying down Holborn at a rattling rate. When at length he had reached Saffron Hill, he was in a bath of perspiration. His face was quite red; he breathed hard; his heart beat violently; he had got a stitch in his side; and he could not get his gloves on his hot and swollen hands. He stood for a moment with his hat off, wiping his reeking forehead, and endeavouring to recover himself a little, before entering the dreaded presence to which he had been hastening. He even fancied, for a moment, that his eyes gave out sparks of light! While thus pausing, St. Andrew's Church struck ten, half electrifying Titmouse, who bolted up the hill, and was soon standing opposite the door. How the sight of it smote him, as it reminded him of the way in which, on the preceding night, he had bounced out of it! But that could not now be helped; so *ring* went the bell; as softly, however, as he could; for he recollected that it was a very loud bell, and he did not wish to offend. He stood for some time, and nobody answered. He waited for nearly two minutes, and trembled, assailed by a thousand vague fears. He might not, however, have rung loudly enough—so—again, a little louder, did he venture to ring. Again he waited. There seemed something threatening in the great brass plate on the door, out of which “QUIRK, GAMMON, AND SNAP” appeared to look at him ominously. While he thought of it, by the way, there was something very serious and stern in all their faces—he wondered that he had not noticed it before. What a drunken beast he had been to go on in their presence as he had! thought he; then Huckaback's image flitted across his disturbed fancy. “Ah!” thought he, “that's the thing!—that's it, depend upon it: this door will never be opened to *me* again—he's done for me!” He breathed faster, clenched his fist, and involuntarily raised it in a menacing way, when he heard himself addressed—“Oh! dear me, sir, I *hope* I haven't kept you waiting,” said the old woman whom he had before seen, fumbling in her pocket for the door-key. She had been evidently out shopping, having a plate in her left hand, over which her apron was partially thrown. “Hope you've not been ringing long, sir!”

“Oh, dear! no, ma'am,” replied Titmouse with anxious civility, and a truly miserable smile—“Afraid I may have kept *them* waiting,” he added, almost dreading to hear the answer.

“Oh no, sir, not at all—they've all been gone since a little after nine; but there's a letter I was to give you!” She opened the door; Titmouse nearly dropping with fright. “I'll get it for you, sir—let me see, where did I put it?—Oh, in the clerk's room, I think.” Titmouse followed her in. “Dear me—where can it be?” she continued, peering about, and then snuffing the long wick of the candle which she had left burning for the last quarter of an hour, during her absence. “I *hope* none of the clerks has put it away in mistake! Well, it isn't *here*, anyhow.” “Perhaps, ma'am, it's in their *own* room,” suggested Titmouse, in a faint tone. “Oh, p'r'aps it is!” she replied. “We'll

go and see"—and she led the way, followed closely by Titmouse, who caught his breath as he passed the green-baize door.

"Oh, here it is!—well, I never!—who could have put it here, now? I'm sure I didn't. Let me see—it was, no doubt"—said the old woman, holding the letter in one hand and putting the other to her head.

"Never mind, ma'am," said Titmouse, stretching his hand towards her—"now we've got it, it don't much signify." She gave it to him. "Seem particularly anxious for me to get it—did they?" he inquired, with a strong effort to appear unconcerned—the dreaded letter quite quivering, the while, in his fingers.

"No sir—Mr. Quirk only said I was to give it to you when you called. B'lieve they sent it to you, but the clerk said he couldn't find your place out; by the way, (excuse me, sir,) but yours *is* a funny name! How I heard 'em laughing at it, to be sure! What makes people give such queer names? Would you like to read it here, sir?—you're welcome."

"No, thank you, madam—it's of not the *least* consequence," he replied, with a desperate air; and tossing it with attempted carelessness into his hat, which he put on his head, he very civilly wished her good-night, and departed—very nearly inclined to sickness, or faintness, or something of the sort, which the fresh air might perhaps dispel. He quickly espied a lamp at a corner, which promised to afford him an uninterrupted opportunity of inspecting his letter. He took it out of his hat. It was addressed—simply, "Mr. Titmouse, *Cocking Court, Oxford Street,*" (which accounted, perhaps, for the clerk having been unable to find it;) and, having been opened with trembling eagerness, thus it read:—

"Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap present their compliments to Mr. Titmouse, and are anxious to save him the trouble of his intended visit this evening. They exceedingly regret that obstacles (which it is to be hoped, however, may not prove *ultimately* insurmountable) exist in the way of their prosecuting their intended inquiries on behalf of Mr. Titmouse. Since their last night's interview with him, circumstances, which they could not have foreseen, and over which they have no control, have occurred, which render it unnecessary for Mr. T. to give himself any more anxiety in the affair—at least, not until he shall have heard from Messrs. Q., G., and S. If anything of importance *should* hereafter transpire, it is not improbable that Mr. T. may hear from them. They were favoured, this afternoon, with a visit from Mr. T.'s friend—a Mr. Hucklebottom. *Saffron Hill, Wednesday Evening, 12th July, 18—.*"

When poor Titmouse had finished reading over this vague, frigid, and disheartening note a second time, a convulsive sob or two pierced his bosom, indicative of its being indeed swollen with sorrow; and at length, overcome by his feelings, he cried bitterly—not checked even by the occasional exclamations of one or two passers-by. He felt as if he could have almost relieved himself, by banging his head against the wall! A tumultuous feeling of mingled grief and despair prevented his thoughts, for a long while from settling on any one idea or object. At length, when the violence of the storm had somewhat abated, on concluding a third perusal of the death-warrant to all his hopes, which he held in his hand, his eye lit upon the strange word which was intended to describe his friend Huckaback; and it instantly changed both the kind of his feelings, and the direction in which they had been rushing. Grief became rage; and the stream foamed in quite a new direction—namely, towards Huckaback. That fellow he considered to be the sole cause of the direful disaster which had befallen him. He utterly lost sight of one circumstance, which one should have thought might have occurred to his thoughts at such a time—viz., his own

offensive and insolent behaviour overnight to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. But so it was:—yes, upon the devoted (but unconscious) head of Huckaback, was to descend the lightning rage of Tittlebat Titmouse. Hotter and hotter became his rage, as he neared the residence of Huckaback. When he had reached it, he sprung up-stairs; knocked at his *quondam* friend's door; and on the instant of its being—doubtless somewhat surprisedly—opened by Huckaback, who was undressing, Titmouse sprung towards him, let fly a goodly number of violent blows upon his face and breast—and down fell Huckaback upon the bed behind him, insensible, and bleeding profusely from the nose.

"There! there!"—gasped Titmouse, breathless and exhausted, discharging a volley of oaths and opprobrious epithets at the victim of his fury. "Do it again! You will, won't you! *You'll* go—and meddle again in other people's—you—cu-cu-cursed officious"—But his rage was spent—the paroxysm was over; the silent and bleeding figure of Huckaback was before his eyes; and he gazed at him terror-stricken. What had he done! He sunk down on the bed beside Huckaback—then started up, wringing his hands, and staring at him in an ecstasy of remorse and fright. It was rather singular that the noise of such an assault should have roused no one to inquire into it; but so it was. Frightened almost out of his bewildered senses, he closed and bolted the door; and addressed himself, as well as he was able, to the recovery of Huckaback. Propping him up, and splashing cold water in his face, Titmouse at length discovered symptoms of revival, which he anxiously endeavoured to accelerate, by putting to the lips of the slowly awakening victim of his violence some cold water, in a tea-cup. He swallowed a little; and soon afterwards, opening his eyes, stared on Titmouse with a dull eye and bewildered air. "What's been the matter?" at length he faintly inquired. "Oh, Hucky! so glad to hear you speak again. It's I—I—Titty! I did it! Strike me, Hucky, as soon as you're well enough! Do—kick me—anything you choose! I won't hinder you!" cried Titmouse, sinking on his knees, and clasping his hands together, as he perceived Huckaback rapidly reviving. "Why, what is the matter?" repeated that gentleman, with a wondering air, raising his hand to his nose, from which the blood was still trickling. The fact is, that he had lost his senses, not so much from the violence of the injuries he had received, as from the suddenness with which they had been inflicted.

"I did it all—yes, I did!" continued Titmouse, gazing on him with a look of agony and remorse. "Why, I can't be awake—I can't!" said Huckaback, rubbing his eyes, and then staring at his stained shirt-front and hands. "Oh, yes, you are—you are!" groaned Titmouse; "and I'm going *mad* as fast as I can! Do what you like to me! Lick me if you please! Call in a constable! Send me to jail! Say I came to rob you—anything—I don't care what becomes of me!"

"Why, what *does* all this jabber mean, Titmouse?" inquired Huckaback sternly, apparently meditating reprisals. "Oh, yes, I see! Now you *are* going to give it me! I won't stir. So hit away, Hucky." "Why—are you mad?" inquired Huckaback, grasping him by the collar rather roughly. "Yes, quite! Mad!—ruined!—gone to the devil all at once!" "And what if you are? What did it matter to *me*? What brought you to me, here!" continued Huckaback, in a tone of increasing vehemence. "What have I done to offend you? How *dare* you come *here*? And at this time of night, too? Eh?" "What, indeed! Oh lud, oh lud, oh lud! Kick me, I say—strike me! You'll do me good, and bring me to my senses. *Me* to do all this to you! And we've been such precious good friends always. I'm a brute, Hucky—I've been mad, stark mad, Hucky—and that's all I can say."

Huckaback stared at him more and more; and began at length to suspect how matters stood—namely, that the Sunday's incident had turned Titmouse's

head—he having also, no doubt, heard some desperate bad news during the day, smashing all his hopes.

“Why, curse me, Titmouse, if I can make up my mind what to do to you!” he exclaimed. “I—I suppose you’re going mad, or gone mad, and I must forgive you. But get away with you—out with you, or—or—I’ll call in——” “Forgive me—forgive me, dear Hucky! Don’t send me away—I shall go and drown myself if you do.” “What the d—l do I care if you do? You’d much better have gone and done it before you came here. Nay, be off and do it now, instead of blubbing here in this way.” “Go on! Hit away—it’s doing me good—the worse the better!” sobbed Titmouse. “Come, come—none of this noise here, I’m tired of it.” “But, pray, don’t send me away from you. I shall go straight to the d—l if you do. I’ve no friend but you, Hucky. Yet I’ve been such a villain to you!—But it quite put the d—l into me, when all of a sudden I found it was *you*.” “Me!—Why, what *are* you after?” interrupted Huckaback, with an air of angry wonder. “Oh dear, dear!” groaned Titmouse; “if I’ve been a brute to you, which is quite true, you’ve been the ruin of me clean! I’m clean done for, Huck. Cleaned out! You’ve done my business for me; knocked it all on the head. I sha’n’t never hear any more of it—they’ve said as much in, in their letter—they say that you’ve called——”

Huckaback now began to have a glimmering notion of his having been, in some considerable degree, connected with the mischief of the day—an unconscious agent in it. He audibly drew in his breath, as it were, as he more and more distinctly recollected his visit to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and adverted more particularly to his *threats*, uttered, too, in Titmouse’s name, and as if by his authority. Whew! here was a kettle of fish.

Now, strange and unaccountable as, at first thought, it may appear, the very circumstance which one would have thought calculated to assuage his resentment against Titmouse—namely, that he had really *injured* Titmouse most seriously, (if not indeed irreparably,) and so *provoked* the drubbing which had just been administered to him—had quite the contrary effect. Paradoxical as it may seem, matter of clear mitigation was at once converted into matter of aggravation. When Huckaback felt an involuntary consciousness that the gross indignities which Titmouse had just inflicted on him, had been justified by the provocation—nay, far less than his mischievous interference had deserved;—and when feelings of this sort, moreover, were sharpened by a tingling sense of physical pain from the blows which he had received—the result was, that the sleeping lion of Huckaback’s courage was very near awakening.

“*I’ve half a mind, Titmouse*”—said Huckaback, knitting his brows, and appearing inclined to raise his arm. There was an ominous pause for a moment or two, during which Titmouse’s feelings also underwent a slight alteration. His allusion to Huckaback’s ruinous insult to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, unconsciously converted his remorse into rage, which it rather, perhaps, resuscitated. He rose from his knees. “Ah!” said he, in quite an altered tone, “you *may* look fierce! you may!—you’d better strike me, Huckaback—do! Finish the mischief you’ve begun this day! Hit away—you’re quite safe,”—and he secretly prepared himself for the mischief which—did not come. “You *have* ruined me! you have, Huckaback!” continued Titmouse, with increasing vehemence; “and I shall be cutting my throat—nay,” striking his fist on the table, “I will!” “You don’t say so!” exclaimed Huckaback, apprehensively. “No, Titmouse, don’t—don’t think of it; it will all come right yet, depend on’t; you see if it don’t!” “Oh, no! it’s all done for—it’s all up with me!” “But what’s been done?—let us hear,” said Huckaback, as he passed a wet towel to and fro over his ensanguined features. Titmouse, with many grievous sighs, took out the letter which had

produced the paroxysms I have been describing, and read it aloud. "And only see how they've spelled your name, Huckaback—look!" he added, handing his friend the letter.

"How *particular* vulgar!" exclaimed Huckaback, with a contemptuous air, which, overspreading his features, half-closed as was his left eye, and swollen as were his cheek and nose, would have made him a queer object to one who had leisure to observe such matters. "And so this is all they say of *me*," he continued. "How do you come to know that I've been doing you a mischief? All I did was just to look in, as respectful as possible, to ask how you was, and they very civilly told me you was very well, and we parted——" "Nay, now, that's a lie, Huckaback, and you know it!" interrupted Titmouse. "It's true, so help me——!" vehemently asseverated Huckaback.

"Why, perhaps you'll deny that you wrote and told me all you said," interrupted Titmouse indignantly, feeling in his pocket for Huckaback's letter, which that worthy had at the moment quite forgotten having sent. "Oh,—ay, if you mean *that*,—hem!"—he stammered. "Come, you know you're a liar, Huck—but it's no good now: liar or no liar, it's all over." "The pot and kettle, anyhow, Tit, as far as that goes—but let's spell over this letter; we haven't studied it yet; I'm a hand, rather, at getting at what's said in a letter!—Come"—and they drew their chairs together, Huckaback reading over the letter slowly, alone; Titmouse's eyes travelling incessantly from his friend's countenance to the letter, and so back again, to gather what might be the effect of its perusal.

"There's a glimpse of daylight yet, Titty!" said Huckaback as he concluded reading it. "Now! Is there really? Do tell me, Hucky——" "Why, first and foremost, how uncommon polite they are, (except that they haven't manners enough to spell my name right)——" "Really—and so they are!" exclaimed Titmouse, rather elatedly. "And then, you see, there's another thing—if they'd meant to give the thing the go-by altogether, what could have been easier than to have said so?—but they haven't said anything of the sort, so they don't mean to give it all up." "Lord, Huck! what would I give for such a head as yours! What you say is quite true," said Titmouse, still more cheerfully. "To be sure, they do say there's an *obstacle*—an obstacle, you see—nay, it's obstacles, which is several, and that——" Titmouse's face fell. "But they said again, that it's—it's—curse their big words—they say it's—to be got over in time." "Well—that's something, isn't it?"

"To be sure it is; and a'n't anything better than nothing? But then, again, here's a stone in the other pocket—they say there's a *circumstance*?—Don't you hate circumstances, Titty?—I do." "So do I!—What does it mean? I've often heard—isn't it a *thing*? And that may be—anything." "Oh, there's a great dif—hem! And they go on to say it's happened since you was there——" "Curse me, then, if that don't mean *you*, Huckaback!" interrupted Titmouse, with returning anger. "No, that can't be it; they said they'd no control over the circumstances:—now they *had* over me; for they ordered me to the door, and I went; a'n't that so, Titty?—Lord, how my eye does smart, to be sure?" "And don't I smart all over, inside and out, if it comes to that?" inquired Titmouse dolefully. "There's nothing particular in the rest of the letter—only uncommon civil, and saying if anything turns up you shall hear." "I could make that out myself—so there's nothing in that"—said Titmouse quickly. "Well—if it *is* all over—what a pity! Such things as we could have done, Titty, if we'd got the thing—eh?"

Titmouse groaned at this glimpse of the heaven he seemed shut out of for ever. "Can't you find anything—nothing at all comfortable-like, in the letter?" he inquired, with a deep sigh. Huckaback again took up the letter and spelled it over. "Well," said he, striving to give himself an appearance of

thinking, "there's something in it that, after all, I don't seem to get to the bottom of—they've seemingly taken quite a deal of pains with it."

[And undoubtedly it *was* a document that had been pretty well considered by its framers before being sent out; though, probably, they had hardly anticipated its being so soon afterwards subjected to the scrutiny of the acute intellects which were now engaged upon it.]

"And then, again, you know they are lawyers; and do *they* ever write anything that hasn't got more in it than anybody can find out? These gents that wrote this, they're a trick too keen for the thieves even—and how can *we*—hem!—but I wonder if that fat, old, bald-headed gent, with sharp eyes, was Mr. Quirk——" "To be sure it was," interrupted Titmouse, with a half shudder. "Was it? Well, then, I'd advise old Nick to look sharp before he tackles that old gent, that's all!"

"Give me Mr. Gammon for my money—such an *uncommon* gentlemanlike—he's quite taken to me——" "Ah, that, I suppose, was him with the black velvet waiscoat and white hands! But *he* can look stern, too, Tit! You should have seen him ring, when—hem!—But what was I saying about the letter? Don't you see they say they'll be sure to write if anything turns up?" "So they do, to be sure! Well—I'd forgot that!" interrupted Titmouse brightening up. "Then, isn't there their advertisement in the *Flash*? They hadn't their eye on anything when they put it there, I daresay!—They can't get out of that, anyhow!"

"I begin to feel all of a sweat, Hucky; I'm sure there's something in the wind yet!" said Titmouse, drawing nearer still to his comforter. "And more than that—would they have said half they did to me last night——"

"Eh! hollo, by the way! I've not heard of what went on last night! So you went to 'em? Well—tell us all that happened—and nothing but the truth, be *sure* you don't; come, Titty!" said Huckaback, snuffing the candle, and then turning eagerly to his companion.

"Well—they'd such a number of queer-looking papers before them, some with old German-text writing, and others with zig-zag marks—and they were so uncommon polite—they all three got up as I went in, and made me bows one after the other, and said, 'Yours most obediently, Mr. Titmouse,' and a great many more such things." "Well—and then?" "Why Hucky, so help me——" and 'pon my soul, that old gent, Mr. Quirk, told me"—Titmouse's voice trembled at the recollection—"he says, 'Sir, you're the real owner of Ten Thousand a-Year.'" "Lawks!" ejaculated Huckaback, opening wider and wider his eyes and ears as his friend went on. "'And a title—a *lord*, or something of that sort—and you've a great many country seats; and there's been £10,000 a-year saving up for you ever since you was born—and heaps of interest.'" "Lord, Tit! you take my breath away," gasped Huckaback, his eyes fixed intently on his friend's face. "Yes; and they said I might marry the most beautifulest woman that ever my eyes saw, for the asking." "You'll forget poor Bob Huckaback, Tit!" murmured his friend despondingly. "Not I——" "Have you been to Tag-rag's to-day, after hearing all this?"

[The thermometer seemed to have been plunged out of hot water into cold—Titmouse was down to zero in a trice.]

"Oh!—that's it! 'Tis all gone again! What a fool I am! We've clean forgot this cursed letter—and that leads me to the end of what took place last night. That cursed shop was what we split on!" "Split on the shop! eh? What's the meaning of that?" inquired Huckaback, with eager anxiety. "Why, that's the thing," continued Titmouse, in a faltering tone, and with a depressed look—"That was what I wanted to know myself; for they said I'd better go back!! So I said, 'Gents,' said I, 'I'll be——if I'll go back to

the shop any more ; ' and I snapped my fingers at them—so ! (for you know what a chap I am when my blood's up.) And they all turned gashly pale—they did, upon my life—you never saw anything like it ! And one of them said then, in a humble way, ' Wouldn't I please to go back to the shop, just for a day or two, till things is got to rights a bit.' ' Not a day nor a minute ! ' says I, in an immense rage. ' We think you'd better, really,' said they. ' Then,' says I, ' if that's your plan, curse me if I won't cut with you all, and I'll employ some one else ! ' and—would you believe me ?—out I went, bang ! into the street ! ! ' " You *did*, Tit ! ! " " They shouldn't have given me so much brandy and water as they did ; I didn't well know what I was about, what with the news and the spirits ! "

" And you went into the street ? " inquired Huckaback, with a kind of horror. " I did, indeed. " " They'd given you the sperrits to see what kind of a chap you'd be if you got the property—only to try you, depend on it ! "

" Lord ! I—I dare say they did ! " exclaimed Titmouse, elevating his head with sudden amazement ; totally forgetting that that same brandy and water he had asked for—" and me never to think of it at the time ! " " Now are you quite sure you wasn't in a *dream* last night, all the while ? " " Oh, dear, I wish I had been—I do, indeed, Hucky ! "

" Well—you went into the street—what then ? " inquired Huckaback, with a sigh of exhausted attention. " Why, when I'd got there, I was fit to bite my tongue off, as one may suppose ; but, just as I was a-turning to go in again, who should come up to me but Mr. Gammon, saying he humbly hoped there was no offence. " " Oh, glorious ! So it was all set right again, then—eh ? " " Why—I—I can't quite exactly say that much, either—but—when I went back, (being obligated by Mr. Gammon being so pressing,) the other two was sitting as pale as death ; and though Mr. Gammon and me went on our knees to the old gent, it wasn't any use for a long time ; and all that he could be got to say was, that perhaps I might look in again to-night—(but they first made me swear a solemn oath on the Bible never to tell any one anything about the fortune)—and then—you went, Huckaback, and you did the business ; they of course concluding I'd sent you ! "

" Oh, bother ! that can't be. Don't you see how civilly they speak of me in this letter ? They're afraid of me, you may depend on it. By the way, Tit, how much did you promise to come down, if you got the thing ? "

" *Come down !*—I really—by Jove, I didn't. No—I'm sure I didn't !"—answered Titmouse, as if new light had burst upon him.

" Why, Tit, I never seed such a goose ! That's it, depend upon it—it's the whole thing ! That's what they're driving at, in the note !—Why, Tit, where was your wits ? D'ye think such gents as them—great lawyers, too—will work for nothing ?—You write and tell them you will come down handsome—say a couple of hundreds, besides expenses—Gad ! 'twill set you on your pins again, Titty !—Rot me ! now I think of it, if I didn't dream last night that you was a Member of Parliament or something of that sort. " " A Member of Parliament ! And so I shall, if all this turns up well. " " You see if my dream don't come true ! You see, Titty, I'm *always* a thinking of you, day and night. Never was two fellows that was such close friends as we was from the beginning. " [They had been acquainted with each other about a year.]

" Hucky, what a cruel scamp I was to behave to you in the way I did—curse me, if I couldn't cry to see your eye bunged up in that way ! " " Pho ! dear Titty, I knew you loved me all the while—and meant no harm ; you wasn't yourself when you did it—and besides, I deserved ten times more. If you had killed me I should have liked you as much as ever ! "

" Give me your hand, Hucky ! Let's forgive one another ! " cried Titmouse excitedly : and their hands were quickly locked together. " If we don't mis-

manage the thing, we shall be all right yet, Titty; but you won't do anything without speaking to me first—will you, Titty?"

"The thoughts of it all going right again is enough to set me wild, Hucky!—But what shall we do to set the thing going again?"

"*Quarter past one!*" quivered the voice of the paralytic watchman beneath, startling the friends out of their exciting colloquy; his warning being at the same time silently seconded by the long-wicked candle, burning within half an inch of its socket. They hastily agreed that Titmouse should immediately write to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, a proper [*i.e.* a most abject] letter solemnly pledging himself to obey their injunctions in everything for the future, and offering them a handsome reward for their exertions, if successful.

"Well—good-night, Hucky! good-night," said Titmouse, rising. "I'm not the least sleepy—I sha'n't sleep a wink all night long! I shall sit up to write my letter—you haven't got a sheet of paper here, by the way?—I've used all mine." [That was, he had, some months before, bought a sheet to write a letter, and had so used it.]

Huckaback produced a sheet, somewhat crumpled, from a drawer. "I'd give a hundred if I had them!" said he; "I sha'n't care a straw for the hiding I've got to-night—though I'm a *leetle* sore after it, too—and what the deuce am I to say to-morrow to Messrs. Diaper——"

"Oh, you can't hardly be at a loss for a lie that'll suit *them*, surely!—So good-night, Hucky—good-night!"

Huckaback wrung his friend's hand, and was in a moment or two alone. "Haven't my fingers been itching all the while to be at the fellow!" exclaimed he, as he shut the door. "But somehow, I've got too soft a sperrit, and can't bear to hurt anyone;—and then—if the chap gets his £10,000 a-year—why—hem! Titty a'n't such a bad fellow, in the main, after all."

Titmouse hastened homeward. How it was he knew not; but the feelings of elation with which he had quitted Huckaback did not last long; they rapidly sunk in the cold night-air, lower and lower, the further he got from Leicester Square. He tried to recollect *what it was* that had made him take so very different a view of his affairs from that with which he had entered Huckaback's room. By the time that he had reached his own door, he felt in as deplorable and despairing a humour as ever. He sat down to write his letter at once; but after many vain efforts to express his meaning—his feelings being not in the least degree relieved by the many oaths he uttered—he at length furiously dashed his pen, point-wise, upon the table, and thereby destroyed the only implement of the sort he possessed. Then he tore, rather than pulled, off his clothes; blew out his candle with a furious *puff!* and threw himself on his bed—but in so doing banged the back of his head against the back of the bed—and which suffered most, for some time after, probably Mr. Titmouse was best able to tell.

CHAPTER III.

THE means by which Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap became possessed of the important information which put them into motion, as we have seen, to find out by advertisement one yet unknown to them, it will not be necessary, for some time—and which will prove to have originated in a very remarkable accident—for me to explain. Theirs was a keen house, truly, and dealing principally in the criminal line of business; and they would not, one may be sure, have lightly committed themselves to their present extent, namely, in

inserting such an advertisement in the newspapers, and, above all, going so far in their disclosures to Titmouse. Their prudence in the latter step, however, was very questionable to themselves even; and they immediately afterwards deplored together the precipitation with which Mr. Quirk had communicate to Titmouse the nature and extent of his possible good fortune. It was Mr. Quirk's own doing, however, and after as much expostulation as the cautious Gammon could venture to use. I say they had not *lightly* taken up the affair; they had not "acted unadvisedly." They were fortified, first, by the opinions of Mr. Mortmain, an able and experienced conveyancer, who thus wound up an abstrusely learned opinion on the voluminous "case" which had been submitted to him:—

"* * Under all these circumstances, and assuming as above, I am decidedly of opinion that the title to the estate in question is at this moment not in their present possessor (who represents the younger branch of the Dreddlington family), but in the descendants of Stephen Dreddlington, through the female line; which brings us to Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse. This person, however, seems not to have been at all aware of the existence of his rights, or he could hardly have been concerned in the pecuniary arrangements mentioned at fol. 33 of the case. Probably something may be heard of his heir by making careful inquiries in the neighbourhood where he was last heard of, and issuing advertisements for his heirs-at-law; care, of course, being taken not to be so specific in the terms of such advertisements as to attract the notice of A. B. (the party now in possession). If such person should, by the means above suggested, be discovered, I advise proceedings to be commenced forthwith, under the advice of some gentlemen of experience at the common-law bar.

"MOULDY MORTMAIN.

"*Lincoln's Inn, January 19, 18—.*"

This was sufficiently gratifying to the "house;" but, to make assurance doubly sure, before embarking in so harassing and expensive an enterprise—one which lay a good deal, too, without the sphere of their practice which, as already mentioned, was chiefly in criminal law—the same *case* (without Mr. Mortmain's opinion) was laid before a younger conveyancer, who, having much less business than Mr. Mortmain, would, it was thought, "look into the case fully," though receiving only one-third of the fee which had been paid to Mr. Mortmain. And Mr. Fussy Frankpledge—that was his name—*did* "look into the case fully;" and, in doing so, turned over two-thirds of his little library;—and also gleaned—by note and verbally—the opinions upon the subject of some half-dozen of his "learned friends;" to say nothing of the magnificent air with which he indoctrinated his eager and confiding pupils upon the subject. At length his imp of a clerk bore the precious result of his master's labours to Saffron Hill, in the shape of an "opinion," three times as long as, and indescribably more difficult to understand than, the opinion of Mr. Mortmain; and which, if it demonstrated anything beyond the prodigious *cram* which had been undergone by its writer for the purpose of producing it, demonstrated this—namely, that neither the party indicated by Mr. Mortmain, nor the one then actually in possession, had any more right to the estate than the aforesaid Mr. Frankpledge: but that the happy individual so entitled was some third person. Messrs. Quirk and Gammon, a good deal flustered hereat, hummed and hawed on perusing these contradictory opinions of counsel learned in the law; and the proper result followed—*i.e.*, a "consultation," which was to solder up all the differences between Mr. Mortmain and Mr. Frankpledge, or, at all events, strike out some light which might guide their clients on their adventurous way.

Now, Mr. Mortmain had been Mr. Quirk's conveyancer (whenever such a

functionary's services had been required) for about twenty years; and Quirk was ready to suffer death in defence of any opinion of Mr. Mortmain. Mr. Gammon swore by Frankpledge, who had been at school with him, and was a "rising man." Mortmain belonged to the old school—Frankpledge steered by the new lights.

Well, the consultation came off, at length, at Mr. Mortmain's chambers, at eight o'clock in the evening. A few minutes before that hour, Messrs. Quirk and Gammon were to be seen in the clerk's room, in civil conversation with that prim functionary, who explained to them that *he* did all Mr. Mortmain's drafting—pupils were *so* idle; that Mr. Mortmain did not score out much of what he (the aforesaid clerk) had drawn; that he noted up Mr. Mortmain's new cases for him in the reports, Mr. M. having so little time; and that the other day the Vice Chancellor called on Mr. Mortmain—with several other matters of that sort, calculated to enhance the importance of Mr. Mortmain; who, as the clerk was asking Mr. Gammon, in a good-natured way, how long Mr. Frankpledge had been in practice, and where his chambers were—made his appearance, with a cheerful look and a bustling gait, having just walked down from his house in Queen's Square, with a comfortable bottle of old port put on board. Shortly afterwards Mr. Frankpledge arrived, followed by his little clerk, bending beneath two bags of books, and the consultation began.

As Frankpledge entered, he could not help casting a sheep's eye towards a table that glistened with *such* an array of "papers," (a tasteful arrangement of Mr. Mortmain's clerk before every consultation;) and down sat the two conveyancers and the two attorneys. The two conveyancers fenced with one another for some time very guardedly and good-humouredly; pleasant was it to observe the conscious condescension of Mortmain, the anxious energy and volubility of Frankpledge. When Mr. Mortmain said anything that seemed weighty or pointed, Quirk looked with an elated air, a quick triumphant glance, at Gammon; who, in his turn, whenever Mr. Frankpledge quoted an "old case" from Bendloe, Godsbolt, or the Year Books (which, having always piqued himself on his almost exclusive acquaintance with the modern cases, he made a point of doing), gazed at Quirk with a smile of placid superiority. Mr. Frankpledge talked almost the whole time; Mr. Mortmain, immovable in the view of the case which he had taken in his "opinion," listened with an attentive, good-natured air, ruminating pleasantly the while upon the quality of the port he had been drinking (the first of the bin which he had tasted), and upon the decision which the Chancellor might come to on a case brought into court on his advice, and which had been argued that afternoon. At last Frankpledge unwillingly fell foul of a favourite crotchet of Mortmain's—and at it they went, hammer and tongs, for nearly twenty minutes (it had nothing whatever to do with the case they were consulting upon). In the end, Mortmain of course adhered to his points, and Frankpledge entrenched himself in his books; each slightly yielded to the views of the other on immaterial points (or what could have appeared the use of the consultation?), but did that which both had resolved upon doing from the first, *i.e.*, sticking to his original opinion. Both had talked an amazing deal of deep law, which had at least one effect, *viz.*, it fairly drowned both Quirk and Gammon, who as they went home, with not (it must be owned) the clearest perceptions in the world of what had been going on (though, before going to the consultation, each had really known something about the case), stood each stoutly by his conveyancer's opinion, each protesting that he had never been once misled—Quirk by Mortmain, or Gammon by Frankpledge—and each resolved to give his man more of the conveyancing business of the house than he had before. I grieve to add, that they parted that night with a trifle less of cordiality than had been their wont. In the morning, however, this little irritation and competition had

passed away; and they agreed before giving up the case, to take the final opinion of Mr. Tresayle—the great Mr. Tresayle. He was, indeed, a wonderful conveyancer—a perfect miracle of real-property law-learning. He had had such an enormous practice for forty-five years, that for the last ten he had never put his nose out of chambers for pure want of time, and at last of inclination; and had been so conversant with Norman French and law Latin, in the old English letter, that he had almost entirely forgotten how to write the modern English character. His opinions made their appearance in three different kinds of handwriting. First, one that none but he and his old clerk could make out; secondly, one that none but he himself could read; and thirdly, one that neither he, nor his clerk, nor any one on earth, could decipher. The use of any one of these styles depended on—the difficulty of the case to be answered. If it were an easy one, the answer was very judiciously put into No. I.; if rather difficult, it, of course, went into No. II.; and if exceedingly difficult (and also important), it was very properly thrown into No. III.; being a question that really ought not to have been asked, and did not deserve an answer. The fruit within these uncouth shells, however, was precious. Mr. Tresayle's law was supreme over everybody's else. It was currently reported that Lord Eldon even (who was himself slightly acquainted with such subjects) fervently deferred to the authority of Mr. Tresayle; and would lie winking and knitting his shaggy eyebrows half the night, if he thought that Mr. Tresayle's opinion on a case and his own differed. This was the great authority to whom, as in the last resort, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap resolved to appeal. To his chambers they, within a day or two after their consultation at Mr. Mortmain's, dispatched their case, with a highly respectable fee, and a special compliment to his clerk, hoping to hear from that awful quarter within a month—which was the earliest average period within which Mr. Tresayle's opinions found their way to his patient but anxious clients. It came at length, with a note from Mr. Prim, his clerk, intimating that they would find him, *i.e.*, the aforesaid Mr. Prim, at his chambers the next morning, prepared to explain the opinion to them; having just had it read over to him by Mr. Tresayle, for it proved to be in No. II. The opinion occupied about two pages; and the handwriting bore a strong resemblance to Chinese or Arabic, with a quaint intermixture of the uncial Greek character—it was impossible to contemplate it without a certain feeling of awe! In vain did old Quirk squint at it, from all corners, for nearly a couple of hours (having first called in the assistance of a friend of his, an old attorney of upwards of fifty years' standing), nay—even Mr. Gammon, foiled at length, could not for the life of him refrain from a soft curse or two. Neither of them could make anything of it—(as for Snap, they never showed it to him; it was not within his province—*i.e.*, the Insolvent Debtors' Court, the Old Bailey, the Clerkenwell Sessions, the Police Offices, the inferior business of the Common Law Courts, and the worrying of the clerks of the office—a department in which he was perfection itself.)

To their great delight, Mr. Tresayle's opinion completely corroborated that of Mr. Mortmain. Nothing could be more terse, perspicuous, and conclusive than the great man's opinion. Mr. Quirk was in raptures, and immediately sent out for an engraving of Mr. Tresayle, which had lately come out, for which he paid 5s., and ordered it to be framed and hung up in his own room, where already grinned a quaint resemblance, in black profile, of Mr. Mortmain.

Once fairly on the scent, Messrs. Quirk and Gammon soon began to push their inquiries in all directions. They discovered that Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse, having spent the chief portion of his blissful days as a cobbler at Whitehaven, had died in London, somewhere about the year 17—. At this point they stood still a long while, in spite of two advertisements, to which they had

been driven with the greatest reluctance, for fear of attracting the attention of those most interested in thwarting their efforts. Even that part of the affair had been managed somewhat skilfully. It was a stroke of Mr. Gammon's to advertise not for "Heir-at-law," but "*Next of Kin*;" as the reader has seen. The former might have challenged a notice of unfriendly curiosity, which the latter was hardly calculated to attract. At length—at the "third time of asking"—up turned Tittlebat Titmouse, in the way which we have seen. His relationship with Mr. Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse was indisputable; in fact, he was that "deceased person's son and heir-at-law."

The reader may guess the chagrin and disgust of Mr. Gammon at the appearance, manner, and character of the person he fully believed, on first seeing him at Messrs. Tag-rag's, to be the rightful owner of the fine estates held by one who, as against Titmouse, had no more real title to them than had Mr. Tag-rag; and for whom their house was to undertake the very grave responsibility of instituting such proceedings as would be requisite to place Mr. Titmouse in the position which they believed him entitled to occupy—having to encounter a hot and desperate opposition at every point, from those who had nine-tenths of the law—to wit, *possession*—on their side, on which they stood as upon a rock; and its immense means for carrying on the war defensive. That Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap did not contemplate undertaking all this without calculating upon its proving well worthy their while, was only reasonable. They were going voluntarily to become the means of conferring immense benefits upon one who was a total stranger to them—who had not a penny to expend upon the prosecution of his own rights. Setting aside certain difficulties which collected themselves into two awkward words, MAINTENANCE and CHAMPERTY, and stared them in the face whenever they contemplated any obvious method of securing the just reward of their enterprise and toils—setting aside all this, I say, it might turn out, only after a ruinous expenditure had been incurred, that the high authorities which had sanctioned their proceedings, in point of law, had expressed their favourable opinions on a state of facts, which, however satisfactorily they looked on paper, could not be properly substantiated, if keenly sifted, and determinedly resisted. All this, too—all their time, labour, and money, to go for nothing—on behalf of a vulgar, selfish, ignorant, presumptuous, ungrateful puppy, like Titmouse. Well indeed, therefore, might Mr. Gammon, as we have seen he did, give himself and partners a forty-eight hours' interval between his interview with Titmouse and formal introduction of him to the firm, in which to consider their position and mode of procedure. The taste of his quality which that first interview afforded them all—so far surpassing all that the bitter description of him given to them by Mr. Gammon had prepared them for—filled them with inexpressible disgust, and would have induced them to throw up the whole affair—so getting rid both of it and him together. But then, on the other hand, there were certain very great advantages, both of a professional and even directly pecuniary kind, which it would have been madness indeed for any office lightly to throw away. It was really, after all, an unequal struggle between feeling and interest. If they should succeed in unseating the present wrongful possessor of a very splendid property, and putting in his place the rightful owner, by means alone of their professional ability, perseverance, and heavy pecuniary outlay (a fearful consideration, truly, but Mr. Quirk had scraped together some thirty thousand pounds), what recompense could be too great for such resplendent services? To say nothing of the *éclat* which it would gain for their office, in the profession and in the world at large, and the substantial and permanent advantages, if, as they ought to be, they were entrusted with the general management of the property by the new and inexperienced and confiding owner—ay, but there was the rub! What a disheartening and disgusting specimen of such new owner had disclosed itself

to their anxiously expecting but soon recoiling eyes—always, however, making due allowances for one or two cheering indications, on Mr. Titmouse's part, of a certain rapacious and litigious humour, which might pleasantly and profitably occupy their energies for some time to come! They had in their time had to deal with some pleasant specimens of humanity, to be sure; but when with any more odious and impracticable than Tittlebat Titmouse threatened to prove himself? What hold could they get upon such a character as his? Beneath all his coarseness and weakness, there was a glimmer of low cunning which might suffice to keep their superior and practised astuteness in full play. How are they to manage Titmouse?—how acquire an early and firm hold of him, so as to convert him into a *capital client*? His fears and his interests were obviously the engines with which their experienced hands were to work; and several long and most anxious consultations had Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap had on this important matter. The first great question with them was—To what extent, and when, they should acquaint him with the nature of his expectations.

Gammon was for keeping him comparatively in the dark till success was within reach. During that interval (which might be a long one), by alternately stimulating his hopes and fears; by habituating him to an entire dependence on them; by persuading him of the extent of their exertions and sacrifices on his behalf—they *might* do something; mould him a little into shape fit for their purposes; and persuade him that his affairs must needs go to ruin but in their hands. Something like this was the scheme of the cautious, acute, and placid Gammon. Mr. Quirk (with whom had originated the whole discovery) thought this: Tell the fellow at once the whole extent of what we can do for him, viz., turn a half-starving linen-draper's shopman into the owner of £10,000 a-year, and of a great store of ready money. This will, in a manner, stun him into submission, and make him at once and for all what we want him to be. He will immediately fall prostrate with reverent gratitude—looking at us, moreover, as three gods, who at our will can shut him out of heaven. "*That's the way*," said Mr. Quirk; and Mr. Quirk had been forty years in practice—had made the business what it was—still held half of it in his own hands (two-thirds of the remaining half being Gammon's and the residue Snap's): and Gammon, moreover, had a very distinct perception that the funds for carrying on the war would come out of the tolerably well-stored pockets of their senior partner. So, after a long discussion, he openly yielded his opinion to that of Mr. Quirk—cherishing, however, a very warm respect for it in his own bosom. It had, therefore, been at length agreed that the communication to Titmouse, on his first interview, of the full extent of his splendid expectations, should depend upon the discretion of Mr. Quirk. The reader has seen the unexpected turn which matters took upon that important occasion; and if it proved Quirk's policy to be somewhat inferior in point of discretion and long-sightedness to that of Gammon, still it must be owned that the latter had cause to admire the rapid generalship with which the consequences of Quirk's false move had been retrieved by him—not ill seconded by Snap. What could have been more judicious than his reception of Titmouse, on the occasion of his being led in again by the subtle Gammon?

The next and greatest matter was, how to obtain any hold upon such a person as Titmouse had shown himself, so as to secure to themselves, in the event of success, the remuneration to which they considered themselves entitled. Was it so perfectly clear that, if he felt disposed to resist it, they could compel him to pay the mere amount of their bill of costs?

Suppose he should turn round upon them, and have their BILL TAXED—Quirk granted with fright at the bare thought. Then there was a slapping *quiddam honorarium* extra—undoubtedly for *that* they must, they feared, trust to the

honour and gratitude of Titmouse ; and a pretty taste of his quality they had already experienced ! Such a disposition as *his*, to have to rely upon for the prompt settlement of a bill of thousands of pounds of costs ! and besides that, to have it to look to for the payment of at least some five or perhaps ten thousands pounds *douceur*—nay, and this was not all. Mr. Quirk had, as well as Mr. Gammon, cast many an anxious eye on the following passages from a certain work entitled *Blackstone's Commentaries* :—

“MAINTENANCE is an officious intermeddling in a suit that no way belongs to one, by ‘maintaining’ or assisting either party with money, or otherwise, to prosecute or defend it. It is an offence against public justice, as it keeps alive strife and contention, and perverts the remedial process of the law into an engine of oppression. The punishment by common-law is fine and imprisonment, and by statute 32 Hen. VIII. c. 9, a forfeiture of £10 !

“CHAMPERTY—(*campi partitio*)—is a species of Maintenance, and punished in the same manner ; being a bargain with a plaintiff or defendant ‘*campum partiri*,’ to divide the land, or other matter sued for, between them, if they prevail at law ; whereupon the champertor is to carry on the suit at his own expense. These pests of civil society, that are perpetually endeavouring to disturb the repose of their neighbours, and officiously interfering in other men’s quarrels, even at the hazard of their own fortunes, were severely animadverted on by the Roman law ; and they were punished by the forfeiture of a third part of their goods, and perpetual infamy.”

These were pleasant passages surely !

Many were the conversations and consultations which the partners had had with Messrs. Mortmain and Frankpledge respectively, upon the interesting question, whether there was any mode of at once securing themselves against the ingratitude of Titmouse, and protecting themselves against the penalties of the law. It made old Mr. Quirk’s bald head even flush all over whenever he thought of their bill being taxed, or contemplated himself the inmate of a prison (above all, at his advanced time of life), with leisure to meditate upon the misdeeds that had sent him thither, to which profitable exercise the legislature would have especially stimulated him by a certain *fine* above mentioned. As for Gammon, he knew there *must* be a way of doing the thing somehow or another ; for his friend Frankpledge felt infinitely less difficulty in the way than Mortmain, whom he considered a timid and old-fashioned practitioner. The courts, said Mr. Frankpledge, were now setting their faces strongly against the doctrine of Maintenance, as being founded on a bygone state of things : *cessante ratione cessat et ipsa lex* was his favourite maxim. There was no wrong without a remedy, he said ; and was there not a *wrong* in the case of a poor man wrongfully deprived of his own ? And how could this be *remedied*, if the old law of Maintenance stood like a bugbear in the way of humane and spirited practitioners ? Thus reasoned within himself that astute person, Mr. Frankpledge ; and at length satisfied himself that he had framed an instrument which would “meet the case”—that “would hold water.” To the best of my recollection, it was a BOND, conditioned to pay the sum of ten thousand pounds to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, within two months of Titmouse’s being put into possession of the rents and profits of the estate in question. The *condition* of that bond was, as its framer believed, drawn in a masterly manner ; and his draft was lying before Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, on the Wednesday morning (*i.e.*, the day after Titmouse’s interview with them), and had succeeded at length in exciting the approbation of Mr. Quirk himself ; when—whew !—down came a note from Mr. Frankpledge, to the effect that, “since preparing the draft bond,” he had “had reason *slightly* to modify his original opinion,” owing to his “having lit upon a late case,” in which an

instrument, precisely similar to the one which he had prepared for his admiring clients, had been held "totally ineffectual and void both at law and in equity." I say Mr. Frankpledge's note was to that effect; for so ingeniously had he framed it—so effectually concealed his retreat beneath a little cloud of contradictory authorities, like as the ink-fish, they say, eludeth its pursuers—that his clients cursed the law, not their draftsman: and moreover, by prudently withholding the *name* of the "late case," he at all events, for a while, had prevented their observing that it was *senior* to some eight or ten cases which (indefatigable man!) he had culled for them out of the legal garden, and arrayed on the back of his draft. Slightly disconcerted were Messrs. Quirk and Gammon, it may be believed, at this new view of the "result of the authorities." "Mortmain is always right!" said Quirk, looking hard at Gammon; who observed simply that one day Frankpledge would be as old as Mortmain then was—by which time (thought he) I also know where *you* will be, my old friend, if there's any truth in the Scriptures! In this pleasant frame of mind were the partners, when the impudent apparition of Huckaback presented itself, in the manner which has been described. Huckaback's commentary upon the disgusting text of Titmouse overnight (as a lawyer would say, in analogy to a well-known term, "Coke upon Littleton" produced an effect upon their minds which may be guessed at. It was while their minds were under these two soothing influences, *i.e.*, of the insolence of Huckaback and the vacillation of Frankpledge, that Mr Gammon had penned the note to Titmouse (surely, under the circumstances, one of extraordinary temper and forbearance), which had occasioned Titmouse the agonies which I have been attempting faintly to describe; and that Quirk, summoning Snap into the room, had requested him to give orders for denial to Titmouse if he should again make his appearance at the office; which injunction Snap forthwith delivered in the clerks' room, in a tone and manner that were a very model of the *imperative mood*.

A day or two afterwards, Mr. Quirk (who was a man that stuck like a limpet to a rock to any point which occurred to him), in poring over that page in the fourth volume of *Blackstone's Commentaries*, where were to be found the passages which have been already quoted (and which both Quirk and Gammon had long had off by heart), as he sat one day at dinner, at home, whither he had taken the volume in question, fancied he had at last hit upon a notable crotchet, which, the more he thought of, the more he was struck with; determining to pay a visit in the morning to Mr. Mortmain. The spark of light that had twinkled till it kindled in the tinder of his mind, was struck by his hard head out of the following sentence of the text in question:—

"A man *may*, however, maintain the suit of his near kinsman, servant, or POOR NEIGHBOUR, out of *charity and compassion*, with impunity; *otherwise*, the punishment is," etc., etc.

Now, it seemed to Mr. Quirk, that the words which I have placed in italics and small capitals, exactly met the case for poor Tittlebat Titmouse. He stuck to that view of the case, till he *almost* began to think that he really had a kind of a sort of a charity and compassion for poor Tittlebat—kept out of his rights—tyrannized over by a vulgar draper in Oxford Street—where, too, no doubt, he was half-starved.—"It's a great blessing that one's got the means—and the inclination, to serve one's poor neighbours,"—thought Quirk, as he slowly swallowed another glass of the *wine that maketh glad the heart of man*—and also *softens* it;—for the more he drank, the more and more pitiful became his mood—the more sensitive was he to compassionate suggestions; and by the time that he had finished the decanter he was actually in

tears. These virtuous feelings brought their own reward, too—for, from time to time, they conjured up, as it were, the faint rainbow image of a bond conditioned for the payment of TEN THOUSAND POUNDS!

To change the metaphor a little—by the time that old Quirk had reached his office in the morning, the heated iron had cooled; if his heart had retained any of the maudlin softness of the preceding evening, the following pathetic letter from Titmouse might have made a very deep impression upon it, and fixed him, in the benevolent and disinterested mind of the old lawyer, as indeed his “poor neighbour.” The following is an exact copy of it. It had been written by Titmouse, all out of his own head; and with his own hand had he left it, at a late hour on the night before.

“To Messrs. QUERK, GAMON, and SNAPE.

“GENTS, “Y^r Esteem’d Favour lies now before Me, which *must Say* have Given me Much Concern, seeing, I Thought it was All Made up betwixt us That was of Such an *Unpleasant Nature* on Tuesday night (ultimo) w^h I most humbly Own (and Acknowledge) was all alone and *intirely* of My Own Fault, and Not in the Least Your’s which behaved to me, Must say, In the most Respectful and superior manner that was possible to think Of, for I truly Say I never was In the Company of Such Imminent and Superior Gents before In my Life w^h will take my Oath sincerely Of, Gents. Please to consider the Brandy (w^h *do* think *was Uncommon Stiff*) such a flustrum As I Was In before, to, w^h was Evident to All of Us there then Assembled and very natral like to be the Case Seeing I have nevir known what Peas of Mind was since I behaved in Such a *Oudacious* way w^h truly was the case I can’t Deny to Such Gents as Yourselfs that were doing me Such Good Fortune And Kindness to me as it would Be a Dreadful *sin and shame* (such as Trust I can never be Guilty of) to be (w^h am not) and never Can Be insensible Of, Gents do Consider all this Favourably because of my humble Amends w^h I here Make with the greatest Trouble in my Mind that I have Had Ever Since, it was all of the Sperrits I Tooke w^h made me Go On at such a Rate w^h was always (beg to Assure y^r most resp^e house) the Case Since my birth when I took Sperrits never so little Since I had the Meazles when I was 3 Years Old as I Well Recollect and hope it will be Born in Mind what is Often Said and I’m Sure I’ve read it Somewhere Else that People that Is Drunk Always speaks the *Direct Contrarywise* of their True and Real Thoughts. (w^h am Certain never was any Thing Truer in my case) so as I get the Money or What not, do whatever you Like w^h are quite welcome to Do if you please, and No questions Asked, don’t Mind saying by The Way It shall Be As Good as £200 note in The way of your Resp^e House if I Get the Estate of w^h am much In Want of. Mr. Gamon (w^h is the most Upright gent that ever I came across in All my Life) will tell you that I Was Quite Cut up when he came After me in that kind Way and told him Then how I loved y^r Respect^e House and would do all In My power to Serve You, which see if I Don’t, I was in Such a rage with that Fellow (He’s only in a *Situation* in Tottenham C^t Road) Huckaback which is his true name it was an *oudacious* thing, and have given him such a Precious Good hiding last Night as you never saw when on his Bendid Knees He asked the pardon of your Respectable House, say^s nothing Of Me w^h w^d not allow because I said I would Not Forgive Him because he had not injured me: But you, w^h I wonder at his *Impudence* in Calling on Professional Gents like you, if I get The Estate shall never cease to Think well of you and mean While how full of Trouble I am *Often Thinking Of Death* which is the End of Every Thing And then in that Case who will the Property Go to Seeing I Leave never a Brother or Sister Behind me. And Therefore Them That w^d Get it I Feel Sure of w^d Not do So Well by you (if You will Only

believe Me) So Gents. This is all at present That I will Make so Bold to trouble you With About my Unhappy Affairs Only to say That am *used* most Intolerably Bad now In The Shop quite Tyranicall And Mr. Tag-rag as Set Them All Against Me and I shall Never Get Another Situatⁿ for want of a Cha^r which he will give me say^s noth^g at Present of the Sort of Victules w^h give me Now to Eat Since Monday last, For Which am Sure the Devil must have Come In to That Gentleman (Mr. Tag-rag, he was only himself in a Situation in Holborn once gett^s the Business by marry^s the widow w^h wonder At for he is nothing Particular to look At.) I am y^{rs}

Humbly to Command Till Death (always Humbly Begging pardon for the bad Conduct w^h was guilty of when In Liquor Especially On an Empty Stomach, Having Taken Nothing all that Day excepting what I could not Eat), Your's most Resp^t,

"TITTLBAT TITMOUSE.

"P.S. Will Bring That young Man with Tears In his Eyes to Beg y^r pardon Over again If You Like w^h will Solemnly Swear if Required That he did It all of His *own* Head And that Have given It him For it in the Way That is Written Above And humbly Trust You Will make me So happy Once more by Writing To Me (if it is only a Line) To say You Have Thought No more of it. T. T. No 9 Closet Ct. Oxford Street. 14/7/18—"

This touching epistle, I was saying, might have brought tears into Mr. Quirk's eyes, if he had been *used* to the melting mood, which he was not; having never been seen to shed a tear but once—when five-sixths of his little bill of costs (£196 15s. 4d.) were taxed off in an action on a Bill of Exchange for £20. As it was, he tweedled the letter about in his hands for about five minutes, in a musing mood, and then stepped with it into Mr. Gammon's room. That gentleman took the letter with an air of curiosity, and read it over; at every sentence (if indeed a sentence there was in it) bursting into soft laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed on concluding it—"a comical gentleman, Mr. Titmouse, upon my honour!" "Funny— isn't it rather?" interposed Mr. Quirk, standing with his hands fumbling about in his breeches pockets. "What a crawling despicable little rascal!—ha, ha, ha!" "Why—I don't quite say that, either," said Quirk, doubtfully—"I—don't exactly look at it in *that* light!" "My dear sir!" exclaimed Gammon, leaning back in his chair, and laughing rather heartily (at least for him). "You can't leave off that laugh of yours," said Quirk, a little tartly; "but I must say I don't see anything in the letter to laugh at so particularly. It is written in a most respectful manner, and shows a proper feeling towards the house." "Ay! see how he speaks of *me*!" interrupted Gammon, with such a smile!—"And doesn't he speak so of me? and all of us?" "He'll let the house tread on him till he can tread on the house, I dare say." "But you must own, Mr. Gammon, it shows we've licked him into shape a bit—eh?" "Oh, it's a little vile creeping reptile now, and so it will be to the end of the chapter—of our proceedings; and when we've *done* everything—really, Mr. Quirk! if one *were* apt to lose one's temper, it would be to see such a *thing* as that put into possession of such a fortune."

"That may be, Mr. Gammon; but I really—hem!—trust—I've—a higher feeling!—To right—the injured—" He could get no further. "Hem!" exclaimed Gammon.

The partners smiled at one another. A touch, or an attempted touch at *disinterestedness*!—and at Quirk's time of life!

"But he's now in a humour for *training*, at all events—isn't he?" exclaimed Quirk—"we've something now to go to work upon—gradually. "Isn't that a leaf out of *my* book, Mr. Quirk?—isn't that exactly what—" "Well, well,—

what does it signify?" interrupted Quirk, rather petulantly—"I've got a crotchet that'll do for us, yet, about the matter of law, and make all right and tight—so I'm going to Mortmain.

"I've got a little idea of my own of that sort, Mr. Quirk," said Gammon—"I've got an extract from Co-Litt—. I can't imagine how either of them could have missed it; and, as Frankpledge dines with me to-day, we shall talk it all over. But, by the way, Mr. Quirk, I should say, with all deference, that we'll take no more notice of this fellow till we've got some screw tight enough—"

"Why—all that may be very well; but you see, Gammon, the fellow seems the real heir, after all—and if *he* don't get it, *no one can*; and if *he* don't—we don't! eh?"

"There's a very great deal of force in that observation, Mr. Quirk," said Gammon emphatically:—and, tolerably well pleased with one another, they parted.

"I think, by the way," said Mr. Gammon to Mr. Quirk, before they parted on the previous evening, "it may be as well, all things considered, to acknowledge the receipt of the fellow's note—eh?—*Can't* do any harm, you know, and civility costs nothing—hem!"

"The very thing I was thinking of," replied Quirk, as he always did on hearing any suggestion from Mr. Gammon. So by that night's post was dispatched (post-paid) the following note to Mr. Titmouse:—

"Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap have the pleasure of acknowledging the receipt of Mr. Titmouse's polite letter of last night's date; and earnestly beg that he will not distress himself about the little incident that occurred at their office on Tuesday night, and which they assure him they have quite forgotten. They make all allowances, however their feelings suffered at the time. They beg Mr. T. will give them credit for not losing sight of his interests, to the best of their ability; obstructed as they are, however, by numerous serious difficulties. If they should be in any degree hereafter overcome, he may rest assured of their promptly communicating with him; and till then they trust Mr. T. will not inconvenience himself by calling on, or writing to them.

"Saffron Hill, 15th July, 18—.

"P.S.—Messrs. Q., G., and S. regret to hear that any unpleasantness has arisen [Gammon could hardly write for laughing] between Mr. Titmouse and his friend Mr. Hicklebagle, who, they assure him, manifested a very warm interest in behalf of Mr. T., and conducted himself with the greatest propriety on the occasion of his calling upon Messrs. Q., G., and S. They happened at that moment to be engaged in matters of the highest importance; which will, they trust, explain any appearance of abruptness they might have exhibited towards that gentleman. Perhaps Mr. Titmouse will be so obliging as to intimate as much to Mr. Hickerbag."

There was an obvious reason for this polite allusion to Huckaback. Gammon thought it very possible that that gentleman might be in Mr. Titmouse's confidence and exercise a powerful influence over him hereafter; and which influence Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap might find it well worth their while to secure beforehand.

The moment that Titmouse, with breathless haste, had read over this mollifying document, which, being directed to his lodgings correctly, he obtained as soon as he had reached his lodgings, after quitting Mr. Tag-rag, he hastened to his friend Huckaback. That gentleman (who seemed now virtually recognised by Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap as Titmouse's confidant) shook his head,

exclaiming—"Blarney, blarney!" and a sneer settled on his features, till he had read down to the postscript; the perusal of which effected a sudden change in his feelings. He declared, with a great oath, that Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap were "perfect gentlemen," and would "do the right thing, Titmouse might depend upon it;" an assurance which greatly cheered Titmouse, to whose keen discernment it never once occurred to refer Huckaback's altered tone to the right cause, viz., the lubricating quality of the postscript; and since Titmouse did not allude to it, no more did Mr. Huckaback, although his own double misnomer stuck a little in his throat. So effectual, indeed, had been that most skilful postscript upon the party whom it had been aimed at, that he exerted himself unceasingly to revive Titmouse's confidence in Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and so far succeeded, that Titmouse returned to his lodgings at a late hour, a somewhat happier, if not a *wiser* man than he had left them. By the time, however, that he had got into bed, having once more spelled over the note in question, he felt as despondent as ever, and thought that Huckaback had not known what he had been talking about. He also adverted to an *apparently* careless allusion by Huckaback to the injuries which had been inflicted upon him by Titmouse on the Wednesday night: and which, by the way, Huckaback determined it should be no fault of his if Titmouse easily forgot! He hardly knew why—but he disliked this particularly.—Whom had he however, in the world, but Huckaback? In company with him alone, Titmouse felt that his pent-up feelings could discharge themselves.

"Mr. Tag-rag began, at length, in some degree, to relax his *active* exertions against Titmouse, simply because of the trouble it gave him to keep them up. He attributed the pallid cheek and depressed manner of Titmouse entirely to the discipline which had been inflicted upon him at the shop, and was gratified at perceiving that all his other young men seemed, especially in his presence, to have imbibed his hatred of Titmouse. What produced in Tag-rag this hatred of Titmouse? Simply what had taken place on the Monday. Mr. Tag-rag's dignity and power had been doggedly set at naught by one of his shopmen, who had since refused to make the least submission, or offer any kind of apology. Such conduct struck at the root of subordination in his establishment. Tag-rag now and then looked towards Titmouse, as he stood behind the counter, as if he could have murdered him. Titmouse attempted once or twice, during the week, to obtain a situation elsewhere, but in vain. He could expect no character from Tag-rag; and when the 10th of August should have arrived, what was to become of him? These were the kind of thoughts often passing through his mind during the Sunday, which he and Huckaback spent together in unceasing conversation on the one absorbing event of the last week.

Although the sun shone as vividly and beautifully as on the preceding Sunday, to Titmouse's saddened eye there seemed a sort of gloom everywhere. Up and down the Park he and Huckaback walked, towards the close of the afternoon; but Titmouse had not so elastic a strut as before. He felt empty and sinking. Everybody seemed to know what a sad pretender he was: and they quitted the magic circle much earlier than had been usual with Titmouse. What with the fatigue of a long day's saunter, the vexation of having had but a hasty, inferior, and unrefreshing meal, which did not deserve the name of dinner, and their unpleasant thoughts, both seemed depressed as they walked along the streets. At length they arrived at the open doors of a gloomy-looking building, into which two or three sad and prim-looking people were entering. After walking a few paces past the door—"Do you know, Huck," said Titmouse, stopping. "I've often thought that—that there's something in *Religion*." "To be sure there is, for those that like it—who doubts it? It's all very well in its place, no doubt," replied Huckaback with much surprise, which increased, as he felt

himself slowly being swayed round towards the building in question. "But what of that?"

"Oh, nothing: but—hem! hem!" replied Titmouse, sinking his voice to a whisper—"a touch of—religion—would not be so much amiss, just now, I feel—uncommon inclined that way, somehow." "Religion's all very well, Titty, dear!—for them that has much to be thankful for; but, devil take me! what have either you or me to be——" "But, Huck—how do you know but we might *get* something to be thankful for, by praying?—I've often heard of great things.—Come."

Huckaback stood for a moment irresolute, twirling about his cane, and looking rather distastefully towards the dingy building. "To be sure," said he, faintly. Titmouse drew him nearer; but he suddenly started back.—"No! oh, 'tis only a meeting-house, Tit! Curse Dissenters, how I hate 'em! No—I won't pray in a meeting-house, let me be as bad as I may. Give me a regular-like, respectable church, with a proper steeple, and parson, and prayers, and all that."

Titmouse secretly acknowledged the force of these observations; and the intelligent and piously-disposed couple, with perhaps a just, but certainly a somewhat sudden regard for orthodoxy, were not long before they had found their way into a church where evening service was being performed. They ascended the gallery stair; and seeing no reason to be ashamed of being at church, down they both went, with loud clattering steps and a bold air, into the very central seat in the front of the gallery, that happened to be vacant. Titmouse paid amost exemplary attention to what was going on, kneeling, sitting, and standing with exact propriety, in the proper places; joining audibly in the responses, and keeping his eyes pretty steadily on the prayer-book, which he found lying there. He even rebuked Huckaback for whispering (during one of the most solemn parts of the service) that "there was a pretty gal in the next pew!"—He thought that the clergyman was an uncommon fine preacher, and said some things that he *must* have meant for him, Titmouse, in particular.

"Curse me, Hucky!" said he heatedly, as soon as they had quitted the church, and were fairly in the street—"Curse me if—if—ever I felt so comfortable-like in my mind before, as I do now—I'll go next Sunday again." "Lord, Tit, you don't really mean—it's deuced dull work!" "Hang me if I don't, though! and if anything should come of it—if I do but get the estate—(I wonder, now, where *Mr. Gammon* goes to church. I should like to know!—I'd go there regularly)—But if I *do* get the thing—you see if I don't——"

"Ah, I don't know; it's not much use praying for money, Tit; I've tried it myself, once or twice, but it didn't answer!" "I'll take my oath you was staring at the gals all the while, Hucky!" "Ah, Titty!" exclaimed Huckaback, and winked his eye, and put the tip of his fore-finger to the tip of his nose, and laughed.

Titmouse continued in what he doubtless imagined to be a devout frame of mind for several minutes after quitting the church. But close by the aforesaid church, the devil had a thriving little establishment, in the shape of a cigar-shop; in which a showily-dressed young Jewess sat behind the counter, right underneath a glaring gas-light—with a thin stripe of greasy black velvet across her forehead, and long ringlets that rested on her shoulders—bandying slang with two or three other such puppies as Titmouse and Huckaback. Our friends entered and purchased a cigar a-piece, which they lit on the spot; and after each of them had exchanged an impudent wink with the Jewess, out they went, puffing away—all the remains of their piety! When they had come to the end of their cigars they parted, each speeding

homeward. Titmouse, on reaching his lodgings, sunk into profound depression. He felt an awful conviction that his visit to the cigar-shop had entirely spoilt the effect of his previous attendance at the church, and that, if so disposed, he might now sit and whistle for his ten thousand a-year. Thoughts such as these drove him nearly distracted. If, indeed, he had foreseen having to go through such another week as the one just over, I think it not impossible that, before the arrival of the ensuing Sunday, Mr. Titmouse might have afforded a little employment to that ancient but gloomy functionary, a coroner, and his jury. At that time, however, inquests of this sort were matter-of-fact and melancholy affairs enough; which I doubt not would have been rather a *dissuasive* from suicide, in the estimation of one who might be supposed ambitious of the *éclat* of a modern inquest; where, indeed, such strange antics are played by certain new performers as would suffice to revive the corpse (if it were a corpse that had ever had a spark of sense or spirit in it), and make it kick the coroner out of the room. But to one of so high an ambition as Tittlebat Titmouse, how delightful would it not have been, to anticipate becoming (what had been quite impracticable during life) the object of public attention after his death—by means of a flaming dissertation by the coroner on his own zeal and spirit—the nature and extent of his rights, powers, and duties;—when high doctors are browbeaten, the law set at defiance, and public decency plucked by the beard, and the torn and bleeding hearts of surviving relatives still further agonized by an exposure, all quivering under the recent stroke, to the gaping vulgar! Indeed, I sometimes think that the object of certain coroners, now-a-days, is two-fold; first, public—to disgust people with suicide, by showing what horrid proceedings will take place over their carcasses; and secondly, private—to get the means of studying anatomy by *post mortems*, which the said coroner never could procure in his own practice; which enables us to account for some things one has lately seen, viz., that, if a man come to his death by means of a waggon crushing his legs, the coroner institutes an exact examination of the *lungs* and *heart*.

Touching, by the way, the *moral* of suicide, it is a way which some have of *cutting* the Gordian knot of the difficulties of life; which having been done, possibly the very first thing that is made manifest to the spirit, after taking its mad leap in the dark, is—how very easily the said knot might have been untied; nay, that it was *on the very point* of being untied, if the impatient spirit had stayed only a moment longer:—a dismal discovery which may excite ineffable grief at the folly and horror of the crime of which such spirit has been guilty. But ah! it is too late! The triumphant fiend has secured his victim!

I said it was not *impossible* that Mr. Titmouse might, under the circumstances alluded to, have done the deed which has called forth the above very natural and profound reflections; but, upon the whole, it is hardly *probable*, for he knew that by doing so he would (first) irreparably injure society, by depriving it of an enlightened and invaluable member; (secondly) inflict great indignity on his precious body, of which, during life, he had always taken the most affectionate care, by consigning it to burial in a cross-road, at night time, with a stake run through it, and moreover peril the little soul that had just leaped out of it, by not having any burial-service said over his aforesaid remains; and (lastly) lose all chance of enjoying Ten Thousand a-Year—at least upon earth. I own I was a little startled (as I dare say was the reader) at a passage of mournful significance in Mr. Titmouse's last letter to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, viz.—“How full of trouble I am, *often thinking of death*, which is the end of everything;” but on carefully considering the context, I am disposed to think that the whole was only a device of Titmouse's, either to rouse the fears, or stimulate the feelings, or excite the hopes, of the three arbiters of his destiny to whom it was addressed. Mr. Gammon, he

thought, might be thereby moved to pity ; while Mr. Quirk would probably be operated upon by fears, lest the sad contingency pointed at might deprive the house of one who would richly repay their exertions ; and by hopes of indefinite advantage, if they could by any means prevent its happening. I have often questioned Titmouse on the subject, but he would only wink his eye, and say that he “knew *what to be at*” as well as any one ! That these gentlemen really *did* keenly scrutinize, and carefully weigh every expression in that letter, ridiculous as it was, and contemptible as, I fear, it showed its writer to be, is certain ; but it did not occur to them to compare with it, at least, the spirit and intention of their own answer to it. Did the latter document contain less cunning and insincerity, because it was couched in somewhat superior phraseology ? They could conceal their selfish and over-reaching designs, while poor Titmouse exposed all his little mean-mindedness and hypocrisy, simply because he had not learned how to conceal it effectually. ’Twas indeed a battle for the very same object, but between unequal combatants. Each was trying to take the other in. Was there, in fact, a pin to choose between them—except, perhaps, that Titmouse was, in a manner, excused by his necessities ?

But, in the meanwhile, his circumstances were becoming utterly desperate. He continued to endure great suffering at Mr. Tag-rag’s during the day—the constant butt of the ridicule and insult of his amiable companions, and the victim of his employer’s vile and vulgar spirit of hatred and oppression. His spirit (such as it was), in short, was very nearly broken. Though he seized every opportunity that offered, to inquire for another situation, he was unsuccessful ; for all whom he applied to spoke of the *strict character* they should require, “before taking a new hand into their establishment.” His occupation at nights, after quitting the shop, was twofold only—either to call upon Huckaback (whose sympathy, however, he was exhausting rapidly), or solace his feelings by walking down to Saffron Hill, and lingering about the closed office of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—there was a kind of gratification even in that ! He once or twice felt flustered even on catching a glimpse of the old housekeeper returning from some little errand. How he would have rejoiced to get into her good graces, and accompany her into even the kitchen—when he would be on the premises at least, and conversing with one of the establishment of those who he believed could, with a stroke of their pens, turn this wilderness of a world into a paradise for him ! But he dared not make any overtures in that quarter, for fear of their getting to the notice of the dreaded Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap.

At length, no more than three or four shillings stood between him and utter destitution ; and the only person in the world who he could apply to for even the most trivial assistance was Huckaback—whom, however, he knew to be scarcely any better off than himself ; and whom, moreover, he felt to be treating him more and more coldly, as the week wore on without his hearing of any the least tidings from Saffron Hill. Huckaback evidently felt now scarcely any interest or pleasure in the visits of his melancholy friend, and was plainly disinclined to talk about his affairs. At length he quite turned up his nose with disgust, whenever Titmouse took out the well-worn note of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, which was almost dropping in pieces with being constantly carried about in his pocket, taken in and out, and folded and unfolded, for the purpose of conning over its contents, as if there might yet linger in it some hitherto undiscovered source of consolation. Poor Titmouse, therefore, looked at it on every such occasion with as eager and vivid an interest as ever ; but it was glanced at by Huckaback with a half-averted eye, and a cold, drawing, yawning, “Ya—a—as—I see—I—dare—say !” As his impressions of Titmouse’s bright prospects were thus being

rapidly effaced, his smarting recollection of the drubbing he had received became distincter and more frequent; his feelings of resentment more lively, and not the less so, because the expression of them had been stifled (while he had considered the star of Titmouse to be in the ascendant), till the time for setting them into motion and action had gone by. In fact the presence of Titmouse, suggesting such thoughts and recollections, became intolerable to Huckaback; and Titmouse's perceptions (dull as they naturally were, but a little quickened by recent suffering) gave him more and more distinct notice of this circumstance, at the precise time when he meditated applying for the loan of a few shillings. These feelings made him as humble towards Huckaback, and as patient of his increasing rudeness and ill-humour, as he felt abject towards Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; for, unless he could succeed in wringing some trifling loan from Huckaback (if he really had it in his power to advance him *anything*), he could not conjecture what was to become of him. Various faint but unadroit hints and feelers of his had been thrown away; for Huckaback either did not, or could not, comprehend them. But at length a sudden and fearful pressure compelled him to speak out. Gripe, the collector, called one morning for the poor's rates due from Mrs. Squallop (Titmouse's landlady), and cleaned her out of almost every penny of ready money which she had by her. This threw the good woman upon her resources, to replenish her empty pocket—and down she came upon Titmouse—or rather, up she went to him; for his heart sunk within him one night on his return from the shop, having only just taken off his hat and lit his candle, as he heard the fat old termagant's well-known heavy step ascending the stairs, and approaching nearer and nearer to his door. Her loud imperative single knock vibrated through his heart, and he was ready to drop.

"Oh, Mrs. Squallop! How d'ye do, Mrs. Squallop?" commenced Titmouse faintly, when he had opened the door; "Won't you take a chair?" offering to the panting dame almost the only chair he had. "No—I a'n't come to stay, Mr. Titmouse, because, d'ye see, in coorse you've got a pound, at least, ready for me, as you promised long ago—and never more welcome; there's old Gripe been here to-day, and had his hodious rates—('drat the poor, say I! them as can't work should starve!—rates is a robbery!)—but howsomdever he's cleaned *me* out to-day; so, in coorse, I come up to *you*. Got it?" "I—I—I—pon my life, Mrs. Squallop, I'm uncommon sorry—" "Oh, bother your sorrow, Mr. Titmouse!—out with the needful, for I can't stop palavering here." "I—I can't, so help me!" gasped Titmouse, with the calmness of desperation.

"You can't! And marry, sir, why not, may I make bold to ask?" inquired Mrs. Squallop after a moment's pause, striving to choke down her rage. "P'raps you can get blood out of a stone, Mrs. Squallop; it's what I can't," replied Titmouse, striving to screw his courage up to the sticking place, to encounter one who was plainly bent upon mischief. "I've got two shillings—there they are," throwing them on the table; "and cuss me if I've another rap in the world; there, ma'am!"

"You're a liar, then, that's flat!" exclaimed Mrs. Squallop, slapping her hand upon the table, with a violence that made the candle quiver on it, and almost fall down. "*You* have the *himperance*," said she, commencing the address she had been preparing in her own mind ever since Mr. Gripe had quitted her house, "to stand there and tell me you've got nothing in the world but them *two shillings*! Heugh! Out on you, you oudacious fellow!—you jack-a-dandy! You tell me you haven't got more than them two shillings, and yet turns out every Sunday morning of your life like a lord, with your pins, and your rings, and your chains, and your fine coat, and your gloves, and your spurs, and your dandy cane—ough! you whipper-snapper! You're a cheat—you're a swindler, jack-a-dandy! You're the contempt of the whole court,

you are, you jack-a-dandy! You've got all my rent on your back, and have had every Sunday for three months, you cheat!—you low fellow!—you ungrateful chap! You're a-robbing the widow and fatherless! Look at me, and my six fatherless children down there, you good-for-nothing, nasty, proud puppy!—eugh! it makes me sick to see you. *You* dress yourself out like my lord mayor! You've bought a gold chain with my rent, you rascally cheat! *You* dress yourself out?—Ha, ha!—you're a nasty, mean-looking, humpty-dumpty, carrotty-headed——”

“You'd better not say *that* again, Mrs. Squallop,” quoth Titmouse, with a fierce glance.

“Not say it again!—ha, ha! Hoighty-toighty, carrotty-haired jack-a-dandy!—Why, you hop-o-my-thumb! d'ye think I won't say whatever I choose, and in my own house? You're a Titmouse by name and by nature; there a'n't a cockroach crawling downstairs that a'n't more respectable-like and better behaved than you. You're a himpudent cheat, and dandy, and knave, and a liar, and a red-haired rascal—and that in your teeth! Ough! Your name stinks in the court. You're a-taking everybody in as will trust you to a penny's amount. There's poor old Cox, the tailor, with a sick wife and children, whom you've cheated this many months, all of his not having spirit to summons you! But *I'll* set him upon you; you see if I don't—and I'll have my own, too, or I wouldn't give *that* for the laws!” shouted Mrs. Squallop, at the same time snapping her fingers in his face, and then pausing for breath after her eloquent invective.

“Now, what *is* the use,” said Titmouse gently, being completely cowed—“now, what good *can* it do to go on in this way, Mrs. Squallop?”

“Missus me no missus, Mr. Titmouse, but pay me my rent, you jack-a-dandy! You've got my rent on your back, and on your little finger; and I'll have it off you before I've done with you, I warrant you. I'm your landlady, and I'll sell you up: I'll have old Thumbscrew here the first thing in the morning, and distrain everything, and you, too, you jackdaw, if any one would buy you, which they won't! I'll have my rent at last: I've been too easy with you, you ungrateful chap; for, mark, even Gripe this morning says, 'Haven't you a gentleman lodger up above? get him to pay you your own,' says he; and so I will. I'm sick of all this, and I'll have my rights! Here's my son, Jem, a far better-looking chap than you, though he *hasn't* got hair like a sandy mop all under his chin, and he's obligated to work from one week's end to another, in a paper cap and fustian jacket; and you—you painted jackanapes! But now I have got you, and I'll turn you inside-out, though I know there's nothing in you? But I'll try to get at your fine coats, and spurs, and trousers, your chains and pins, and make something of them before I've done with you, you jack-a-dandy!”—and the virago shook her fist at him, looking as though she had not yet uttered even half that was in her heart towards him.

[Alas, alas, unhappy Titmouse, much-enduring son of sorrow! I perceive that you now feel the sharpness of an angry female tongue; and indeed to me, not in the least approving of the many coarse and heart-splitting expressions which she uses, it seems, nevertheless, that she is not very far off the mark in much that she hath said; for, in truth, in your conduct there is not a little that to me, piteously inclined towards you as I am, yet appeareth obnoxious to the edge of this woman's reproaches. But think not, O bewildered and not-with-sufficient-distinctness-discerning-the-nature-of-things Titmouse! that she hath only a sharp and bitter tongue. In this woman behold a mother, and it may be that she will soften before you, who have plainly, as I hear, neither father nor mother. Oh me!]

Titmouse trembled violently; his lips quivered; and the long pent-up tears forced their way at length over his eyelids, and fell fast down his cheeks.

"Ah you may well cry!—you may! But it's too late!—it's my turn to cry now! Don't you think that I feel for my own flesh and blood, that is my six children? And isn't what's mine theirs? And aren't you keeping the fatherless out of their own? It's too bad of you—it is! and you know it is," continued Mrs. Squallop, vehemently.

"*They've* got a mother—a kind—good—mother—to take—care of them," Titmouse sobbed, "but there's been no one in the—the—world that cares a straw for *me*—this twenty—years!" He fairly wept aloud.

"Well, then, more's the pity for *you*. If you had, they wouldn't have let you make such a puppy of yourself—and at your landlady's expense, too. You know you're a fool," said Mrs. Squallop, dropping her voice a little; for she was a *mother*, after all, and she knew that what poor Titmouse had just stated was quite true. She tried hard to feed the fire of her wrath, by forcing into her thoughts every aggravative topic against Titmouse that she could think of; but it became every moment harder and harder to do so, for she was consciously softening rapidly towards the weeping and miserable little object, on whom she had been heaping such violent and bitter abuse. He was a great fool, to be sure—he was very fond of fine clothes—he knew no better—he had, however, paid his rent well enough till lately—he was a very quiet, well-disposed lodger, for all *she* had known—he had given her youngest child a pear not long ago. Really, thought Mrs. Squallop, I may have gone a *leetle* too far.

"Come—it a'n't no use crying in this way. It won't put money into your pocket, nor my rent into mine. You know you've wronged me, and I *must* be paid," she added, but in a still lower tone. She tried to cough away a certain rising disagreeable sensation about her throat, that kept increasing: for Titmouse, having turned his back to hide the extent of his emotions, seemed half-choked with suppressed sobs. "So you won't speak a word—not a word—to the woman you've injured so much?" inquired Mrs. Squallop, trying to assume a harsh tone: but her eyes were a little obstructed with tears. "I—I *can't* speak," sobbed Titmouse—"I—I feel ready to drop—everybody hates me"—here he paused; and for some moments neither spoke. "I've been kept on my legs the whole day about the town by Mr. Tag-rag, and had no dinner. I—I—wish I was *dead*? I do!—you may take all I have—here it is," continued Titmouse, with his foot pushing towards Mrs. Squallop the old hair trunk that contained all his little finery. "I sha'n't want them much longer, for I'm turned out of my situation."

This was too much for Mrs. Squallop, and she was obliged to wipe her full eyes with the corner of her apron, without saying a word. Her heart smote her for the misery she had inflicted on one who seemed quite broken down. Pity suddenly flew, fluttering his wings—soft dove!—into her heart, and put to flight in an instant all her enraged feelings. "Come, Mr. Titmouse," said she, in quite an altered tone, "never mind *me*; I'm a plain-spoken woman enough, I dare say—and often say more than I mean—for I know I a'n't over particular when my blood's up—but—lord!—I—I—wouldn't hurt a hair of your head, poor chap!—for all I've said—no, not for double the rent you owe me. Come! don't go on so, Mr. Titmouse—what's the use!—it's all quite—over—I'm *so* sorry—Lud? if I'd *really* thought"—she almost sobbed—"you'd been so—so—why, I'd have waited till to-morrow night before I'd said a word. But, Mr. Titmouse, since you haven't had any dinner, won't you have a mouthful of something—a bit of bread and cheese!—I'll soon fetch you up a bit, and a drop of beer—we've just had it in for our suppers." "No, thank you—I can't—I can't eat!" sobbed Titmouse. "Oh, bother it, but you *shall*? I'll go down and fetch it up in half-a-minute, as sure as my name is Squallop!" And out of the room and downstairs she bustled, glad of a moment to recover herself.

"Lord-a-mercy!" said she, on entering her room, to her eldest daughter and

a neighbour who had just come in to supper—and while she hastily cut a thick hunch of bread and a good slice of cheese—"there I've been a-rating that poor little chap, up at the top room (my dandy lodger, you know), like anything—and I really don't think he's had a morsel of victuals in his belly this precious day; and I've made him cry, poor soul! as if his heart would break. Pour us out half a pint of that beer, Sally—a *good* half pint, mind! I'm going to take it upstairs directly. I've gone a deal too far with him, I do think; but it's all of that nasty old Gripe; I've been wrong all the day through it! How I hate the sight of old Gripe! What odious-looking people they do get to collect the rates and taxes, to be sure!—Poor chap," she continued, as she wiped out a plate with her apron, and put into it the bread and cheese, with a knife—"he offered me a chair when I went in, so uncommon civil-like, it took a good while before I could get myself into the humour to *give* it him as I wanted. And he's no father nor mother (half of which has happened to *you*, Sal, and the rest will happen one of these days, you know!), and he's not such a very bad lodger, after all, though he *does* get a little behind-hand now and then, and though he turns out every Sunday like a lord, poor fool—as my poor husband used to say, 'with a shining back and empty belly.'"

"But that's no reason why honest people should be kept out of their own to feed his pride," interposed her neighbour, a skinny old widow, who had never had chick nor child, and was always behind-hand with her own rent; but whose effects were not worth distraining upon. "I'd get hold of some of his fine crinum-crancums and gimcracks, for security like, if I were you. I would, indeed." "Why—no, poor soul—I don't hardly like: he's a vain creature, and puts everything he can on his back, to be sure; but he a'n't quite a *rogue*, neither." "Ah, ha, Mrs. Squallop—you're such a simple soul!—Won't my fine gentleman make off with his finery after to-night?"

"Well, I shouldn't have thought it! To be sure he may! Really, there *can't* be much harm in asking him (in a proper kind of way) to deposit one of his fine things with me, by way of security—that ring of his, you know—eh?—Well, I'll *try* it anyhow," said Mrs. Squallop, as she set off upstairs.

"I know what *I* should do, if so be he was a lodger of *mine*, that's all," said her visitor (as Mrs. Squallop quitted the room), vexed to find their supper so considerably and unexpectedly diminished, especially as to the pot of porter, which she strongly suspected would not be replenished.

"There," said Mrs. Squallop, setting down on the table what she had brought for Titmouse, "there's a bit of supper for you; and you're welcome to it, I'm sure, Mr. Titmouse." "Thank you, thank you—I can't eat," said he, casting, however, upon the victuals a hungry eye, which belied what he said, while in his heart he longed to be left alone with them for about three minutes. "Come, don't be ashamed—fall to work—it's good wholesome victuals," said she, lifting the table near to the edge of the bed, on the side of which he was sitting, and taking up the two shillings lying on the table—"and capital good beer, I warrant me; you'll sleep like a top after it." "You're uncommon kind, Mrs. Squallop; but I sha'n't get a wink of sleep to-night for thinking—" "Oh, bother your thinking! Let me begin to see you eat a bit. Well, I suppose you don't like to eat and drink before me, so I'll go." [Here arose a sudden conflict in the good woman's mind, whether or not she would act on the suggestion which had been put into her head downstairs. She was on the point of yielding to the impulse of her own good-natured, though coarse, feelings; but at last—] "I—I—dare say, Mr. Titmouse, you mean what's right and straightforward," she stammered.

"Yes, Mrs. Squallop—you may keep those two shillings; they're the last farthing I have left in the whole world." "No—hem! hem!—ahem! I was just suddenly a-thinking—now can't you guess, Mr. Titmouse?" "What Mrs

Squallop?" inquired Titmouse, meekly but anxiously. "Why—suppose now—if it were only to raise ten shillings with old Balls, round the corner, on one of those fine things of yours—your ring, say." [Titmouse's heart sank within him.] "Well, well—never mind—don't fear," said Mrs. Squallop, observing him suddenly turn pale again. "I—I only thought—but never mind! it don't signify—good-night! we can talk about that to-morrow—good-night—a good night's rest to you, Mr. Titmouse!" and the next moment he heard her heavy step descending the stairs. Several minutes had elapsed before he could recover from the agitation into which he had been thrown by her last proposal; but within ten minutes of her quitting the room, there stood before him, on the table, an *empty* plate and jug.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE beast! the fat old toad!" thought he, the instant that he had finished masticating what had been supplied to him by real charity and good-nature,—"the vulgar wretch!—the nasty canting old hypocrite!—I saw what she was driving at all the while!—She had her eye on my ring!—She'd have me pawn it at old Balls's—ha, ha!—Catch me! that's all?—Seven shillings a-week for this nasty hole!—I'll be bound I pay nearly half the rent of the whole house—the old cormorant!—out of what she gets from me! Cuss me if I couldn't have kicked her downstairs—porter, bread and cheese, and all—while she was standing canting there!—A snivelling old beldam!—Pawn my ring!!—Lord!!"—Here he began to undress. "Ha! I'm up to her; she'll be coming here to-morrow, with that devil Thumbscrew, to distract, I'll be sworn. Well, I'll take care of *these*, anyhow;" and, kneeling down and unlocking his trunk, he took out of it his guard-chain, breastpin, studs, and ring, carefully folded them up in paper, and depositing them in his trousers' pockets, resolved that henceforth their nightly resting place should be—under his pillow; while during the day they should accompany his person whithersoever he went. Next he bethought himself of the two or three important papers to which Mr. Gammon had referred; and, with tremulous eagerness, read them over once or twice, but without being able to extract from them the slightest clue to their real character and bearing. Then he folded them up in a half-sheet of writing-paper, which he proceeded to stitch carefully beneath the lining of his waist-coat: after which he blew out his slim candle, and with a heavy sigh got into bed. For some moments after he had blown out the candle did the image of it remain on his aching and excited retina; and just so long did the thoughts of *ten thousand a-year* dwell on his fancy, fading, however, quickly away amid the thickening gloom of doubts, and fears, and miseries, which oppressed him. There he lies, stretched on his bed, a wretched figure, lying on his breast, his head buried beneath his feverish arms. Now he turns on his right side, then on his left—presently he starts up, and with muttered curse shakes his little pillow, flinging it down angrily. He cannot sleep—he cannot rest—he cannot keep still. Bursting with irritability, he gets out of bed, and steps to the window, which opening wide, a slight gush of fresh air cools his hot face for a moment or two. His wearied eye looks upward and beholds the moon shining overhead in cold splendour, turning the clouds to gold as they flit past her, and shedding a softened lustre upon the tiled roofs and irregular chimney-pots—the only objects visible to him. O miserable Titmouse! of what avail is it for thee thus to fix thy sorrowful lack-lustre eye upon the cold Queen of Night.

* * * * *

At that moment there happened to be also gazing at the same glorious

object, but at some two hundred miles' distance from London, a somewhat different person, with very different feelings, and in very different circumstances. It was one of the angels of the earth—a pure-hearted and very beautiful girl; who, after a day of peaceful, innocent, and charitable employment, and having just quitted the piano, where her exquisite strains had soothed the feelings of her brother, harassed with political anxieties, had retired to her chamber for the night. She drew her chair to the window-recess, and pushing open the window, sat before it, half-undressed as she was, her hair dishevelled, her head leaning on her hand, gazing upon the scenery before her with tranquil admiration. Silence reigned absolute. Not a sound issued from the ancient groves which spread far and wide on all sides of the fine old mansion in which she dwelt—solemn solitudes, not yet less soothing than solemn!—Then the gentle breeze would enter her window, laden with sweet scents of which he had just been rifling the coy flowers beneath, in their dewy repose, tended and petted during the day by her own delicate hand!—Beautiful moon!—cold and chaste in thy skyey palace, studded with brilliant and innumerable gems, and shedding down thy rich and tender radiance upon this lovely seclusion—was there upon the whole earth a more exquisite countenance then turned towards thee than hers?—Wrap thy white robe, dearest Kate, closer round thy fair bosom, lest the amorous night-breeze do thee hurt, for he groweth giddy with the sight of thy charms! Thy rich tresses, half-uncurled, are growing damp—so it is time that thy blue eyes should seek repose. Hie thee, then, my love!—to yon antique couch, with its quaint carvings and satin draperies dimly visible in the dusky shade, inviting thee to sleep: and having first bent in cheerful reverence before thy Maker—to bed!—to bed!—sweet Kate, nothing disturbing thy serene thoughts, or agitating that beautiful bosom.—Hush! hush!—Now she sleeps! It is well that thine eyes are closed in sleep; for *behold*—see!—the brightness without is disappearing; sadness and gloom are settling on the face of nature; the tranquil night is changing her aspect; clouds are gathering, winds are moaning; the moon is gone;—but sleep on, sweet Kate—sleep on, dreaming not of dark days before thee—Oh, that thou couldst sleep on till the brightness returned!

* * * * *

After having stood thus leaning against the window for nearly half an hour, Titmouse, heavily sighing, returned to bed—but there he tossed about in restlessness till nearly four o'clock in the morning. If he now and then sank into forgetfulness for awhile, it was only to be harassed by the dreadful image of Mrs. Squallop, shouting at him, tearing his hair, cuffing him, flinging a pot of porter in his face, opening his boxes, tossing his clothes about, taking out his invaluable ornaments; by Tag-rag kicking him out of the shop; and Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap dashing past him in a fine carriage, with six horses, and paying no attention to him as he ran shouting and breathless after them; Huckaback following, kicking and pinching him behind.

About six o'clock, Titmouse rose and dressed himself; and, slipping noiselessly and swiftly downstairs, and out of the court, in order to avoid all possibility of encountering his landlady or his tailor, soon found himself in Oxford Street. Not many people were stirring there. One or two men who passed him were smoking their morning's pipe, with a half-awakened air, as if they had only just got out of a snug bed, in which they always slept every moment that they lay upon it. Titmouse almost envied them! What a squalid figure he looked as he paced up and down, till at length he saw the porter of Messrs. Tag-rag and Co. opening the shop-door. He soon entered it, and commenced another joyous day in that delightful establishment. The amiable Mr. Tag-rag continued unaltered.

"You're at liberty to take yourself off, sir, this very day—this moment, sir;

and a good riddance," said he, bitterly, during the course of the day, after demanding of Titmouse how he dared to give himself such sullen airs; "and then we shall see how charming easy it is for gents like you to get another situation, sir! Your looks and manners is quite a recommendation, sir! If I was you, sir, I'd raise my terms! Your worth double what I give, sir!" Titmouse made no reply. "What do you mean, sir, by not answering me—eh, sir?" suddenly demanded Tag-rag, with a look of fury. "I don't know what you'd have me say, sir. What am I to say, sir?" inquired Titmouse, with a sigh. "What, indeed! I should like to catch you! Say, indeed! Only say a word—and out you go, neck and crop. Attend to that old lady coming in, sir. And mind, sir, I've got my eye on you!" Titmouse did as he was bid; and Tag-rag, a bland smile suddenly beaming in his attractive features, hurried down towards the door, to receive some lady-customers, whom he observed alighting from a carriage; and at that moment you would have sworn that he was one of the kindest-hearted, sweetest-tempered men in the world.

When at length *this* day had come to a close, Titmouse, instead of repairing to his lodgings, set off, with a heavy heart, to pay a visit to his excellent friend Huckaback, whom he knew to have received his quarter's salary the day before, and from whom he faintly hoped to succeed in extorting some trifling loan. "If you want to learn the value of money, *try to borrow some*," says Poor Richard—and Titmouse was now going to learn that useful but bitter lesson. Oh, how disheartening was Mr. Huckaback's reception of him! That gentleman, in answering the modest knock of Titmouse, suspecting who was his visitor, opened the door but a little way, and in that little way, with his hand on the latch, he stood, with a plainly repulsive look. "Oh! it's you, Titmouse, is it?" he commenced, coldly. "Yes. I—I just want to speak a word to you—only a word or two, Hucky, if you aren't busy?" "Why, I was just going to go—but what d'ye want, Titmouse?" he inquired, in a freezing manner, not stirring from where he stood. "*Let me come inside a minute*," implored Titmouse, feeling as if his heart were really dropping out of him: and, in a most ungracious manner, Huckaback motioned him in. "Well," commenced Huckaback, with a chilling, distrustful look. "Why, Hucky, I know you're a good-natured chap—you *couldn't*, just for a short time, lend me ten shill—" "No, curse me if I can: and that's flat!" briskly interrupted Huckaback, finding his worst suspicions confirmed. "Why, Hucky, wasn't you only yesterday paid your salary?" "Well!—suppose I was?—what then? You're a monstrous cool hand, Titmouse! I never! So I'm to lend to you, when I'm starving myself! I've received such a lot, haven't I!" "I thought we'd always been friends, Hucky," said Titmouse faintly; "and so we shouldn't mind helping one another a bit! Don't you remember, I once lent you half-a-crown?"

"Half-a-crown?—and that's nine months ago!"

"Do, Hucky, do! 'Pon my soul, I've not a sixpence in the whole world." "Ha, ha! A pretty chap to borrow! You can pay so well! By George, Titmouse, you're a cool hand!" "If you won't lend me I must starve." "Go to my *uncle's*." [Titmouse groaned aloud.] "Well—and why not? What of that?" continued Huckaback, sharply and bitterly. "I dare say it wouldn't be the first time you've done such a trick no more than me. I've been obligated to do it. Why shouldn't you? A'n't there that ring?" "Oh, Lord, oh, Lord! that's just what Mrs. Squallop said last night." "Whew! *She's* down on you, is she! And you have the face to come to me! You—that's a-going to be sold up, come to borrow! Lord, that's good, anyhow! A queer use that to make of one's friends;—it's a taking them in, I say!" "Oh, Hucky Hucky, if you only knew what a poor devil—" "Yes, that's what I was a-saying; but it a'n't 'poor devils' one lends money to, so easily, I warrant me; though you *a'n't* such

a poor devil—you're only shamming! Where's your guard-chain, your studs, your breast-pin, your ring, and all that? Sell 'em! if not, anyhow, *pawn* 'em. Can't eat your cake and have it; fine back must have empty belly with us sort of chaps."

"If you'll only be so uncommon kind as to lend me—this once—ten shillings," continued Titmouse in an imploring tone, "I'll bind myself, by a solemn oath, to pay you the very first moment I get what's due to me from Tag-rag & Co."—Here he was almost choked by the sudden recollection that he had almost certainly nothing to receive.

"You've some property in the moon, too, that's coming to you, you know!" said Huckaback with an insulting sneer. "I know what you're driving at," said poor Titmouse; and he continued eagerly, "and if anything *should* ever come up from Messrs. Quirk, Gam—" "Yough! Faugh! Pish! Stuff!" burst out Huckaback, in a tone of contempt and disgust; "*never* thought there was anything in it, and now *know* it! It's all my eye, and all that!" "Oh, Hucky, Hucky. You don't say so!" groaned Titmouse, bursting into tears; "you did not *always* say so." "It's enough that I say it *now*, then; will that do?" interrupted Huckaback, impetuously. "Oh, Lord, Lord! what is to become of me?" cried Titmouse, with a face full of anguish.

[At this moment, the following was the course of thought passing through the mind of Mr. Huckaback:—It is not *certain* that nothing will come of the fellow's affair with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. It was hardly likely that they would have gone as far as Titmouse represented (lawyers as they were), unless they had seen very substantial grounds for doing so. Besides, even though Titmouse might not get ten thousand a-year, he might yet succeed in obtaining a very splendid sum of money: and if he (Huckaback) could but get a little slice out of it, Titmouse was now nearly desperate, and would promise anything; and if he could but be wheedled in to giving anything in writing—Well, thought Huckaback, I'll try it, however!]

"Ah, Titmouse, you're civil enough *now*, and would *promise* anything," said Huckaback, appearing to hesitate; "but when you get your money you'd forget everything about it—" "Forget my promise! Dear Hucky! only try me—do try me but once, that's all! 'Pon my precious life, ten shillings is worth more to me now than a hundred pounds may be by-and-by."

"Ay, so you say *now*; but d'ye mean to tell me, that if I was now to advance you ten shillings out of my poor little salary," continued Huckaback, apparently carelessly, "you'd, for instance, pay me a hundred pounds out of your thousands?" "Oh, Lord! only you try me—do try me!" said Titmouse eagerly. "Oh, I daresay," interrupted Huckaback, smiling incredulously, and chinking some money in his trousers' pocket. Titmouse heard it, and (as the phrase is) his teeth watered; and he immediately swore such a tremendous oath as I dare not set down in writing, that if Huckaback would that evening lend him ten shillings, Titmouse would give him one hundred pounds out of the very first money he got from the estate.

"Ten shillings is a slapping slice out of my little salary—I shall have, by George, to go without a many things I'd intended getting; it's worth ten pounds to me, just now." "Why, dear Hucky? 'pon my soul, 'tis worth a hundred to *me*! Mrs. Squallop will sell me out, bag and baggage, if I don't give her something to-morrow!" "Well, if I really thought—would you mind giving me, now, a bit of black and white for it?" "I'll do anything you like; only let me feel the ten shillings in my fingers!"

"Well, no sooner said than done, if you're a man of your word," said Huckaback, in a trice producing a bit of paper, and a pen and ink. "So, only just for the fun of it; but—Lord! what stuff!—I'm only bargaining for a hundred pounds of moonshine. Ha, ha! I shall never see the colour of your

money, not I; so I may as well say two hundred when I'm about it, as one hundred——" "Why, hem! Two hundred, Huck, is rather a large figure; one hundred's odds enough, I'm sure!" quoth Titmouse meekly. "P'r'aps, Tit, you forget the *licking* you gave me the other day," said Huckaback with sudden sternness. "Suppose I was to go to an attorney, and get the law of you, what a sight of damages I should have—three hundred pounds at least!"

Titmouse appeared even yet hesitating.

"Well, then!" said Huckaback, flinging down his pen, "suppose I have them yet——" "Come, come, Hucky, 'tis all passed and gone, all that——" "Is it? Well, I never! I shall never be again the same man I was before that 'ere licking. I've a sort of a—a—of a—feeling inside, as if—my breast was—I shall carry it to my grave—curse me if I sha'n't!"

[It never once occurred to Titmouse, not having his friend Mr. Gammon at his elbow, that the plaintiff in the action of *Huckaback v. Titmouse* might have been slightly at a loss for a *witness* of the assault; but something quite as good in its way—a heaven-sent suggestion—*did* occur to him.]

"Ah," said Titmouse suddenly, "that's true; and uncommon sorry am I; but still, a hundred pounds is a hundred pounds, and a large sum for the use of ten shillings, and a licking; but never you think it's all moonshine about my business with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap! You should only have heard what *I've* heard to-day from those gents; hem! but I won't split *again* either."

"Eh? What? Heard from those gents at Saffron Hill?" interrupted Huckaback briskly; "come, Titty, out with it—out with it; no secrets between friends, Titty!"

"No, I'll be hanged if I do—I won't spoil it all again; and now, since I've let out as much, which I didn't mean to do, I'll tell you something else—ten shillings is no use to me, I must have a pound." "Titty, Titty!" exclaimed Huckaback, with unaffected concern. "And won't give more than fifty for it when I get my property either——" [Huckaback whistled aloud, and with a significant air buttoned up the pocket which contained the money; intimating that now the negotiation was all at an end, for that Titmouse's new terms were quite out of the question;] "for I know where I can get twenty pounds easily, only I like to come to a *friend* first."

"You aren't behaving much like a friend to one as has always been a fast friend of yours, Titty! A *pound*!—I haven't got it to part with, that's flat; so, if that's your figure, why, you must even go to your other friend, and leave poor Hucky!"

"Well, I don't mind saying only ten shillings," quoth Titmouse, fearing that he had been going on *rather* too fast.

"Ah, that's something reasonable-like, Titty! and to meet you like a friend, I'll take fifty pounds instead of a hundred; but you won't object now to—you know—a deposit; that ring of yours,—well, well! it don't signify, since it goes against you: so now, here goes, a bit of paper for ten shillings, ha, ha!" and taking a pen, after a pause, in which he called to mind as much of the phraseology of money securities as he could, he drew up the following stringent document:—

"*Know all Men* That you are Bound to *Mr. R. Huckaback* Promising The Bearer (on Demand) To pay Fifty Pounds in Cash out of the Estate, *if you Get it.* (Value received.)

"(Witness), 22d July, 18—.

"R. HUCKABACK."

"There, Titty—if you're an honest man, and would do as you would be done by," said Huckaback, after signing his own name as above, handing the pen to

Titmouse, "sign that; just to show your honour, like—for, in course, I sha'n't ever come on you for the money—get as much as you may."

A blessed thought occurred to poor Titmouse in his extremity, viz., that there was *no stamp* on the above instrument (and he had never seen a promissory-note or bill of exchange without one); and he signed it instantly, with many fervent expressions of gratitude. Huckaback received the valuable security with apparently a careless air; and after cramming it into his pocket, as if it had been in reality only a bit of waste paper, counted out ten shillings into the eager hand of Titmouse; who, having thus most unexpectedly succeeded in his mission, soon afterwards departed—each of this pair of worthies fancying that he had succeeded in cheating the other. Huckaback, having very cordially shaken Titmouse by the hand, heartily damned him upon shutting the door on him; and then anxiously perused and re-perused his "security," wondering whether it was possible for Titmouse at any time thereafter to evade it, and considering by what means he could acquaint himself with the progress of Titmouse's affairs. The latter gentleman, as he hurried homeward, dwelt for a long while upon only one thought—how fortunate was the omission of his friend to have a stamp upon his security! However, he had got the ten shillings safe; and Huckaback might wait for his fifty pounds till—in the meanwhile he, Titmouse, seemed to stand a fair chance of going to the dogs; the ten shillings, which he had just obtained with so much difficulty, were to find their way immediately into the pockets of his landlady, whom it might pacify for a day or two, and what quarter was he now to look to for the smallest assistance? What was to become of him?

He was not aware that all this while, although he heard nothing from them, he occupied almost exclusively the thoughts of those distinguished practitioners in the law, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. They, in common with Huckaback, had an intense desire to share in his anticipated good fortune, and determined to do so according to their opportunities. The excellent Huckaback (a model of a usurer on a small scale) had adroitly seized hold of the very first opportunity that presented itself, for securing a little return hereafter for the ten shillings, with which he had so generously parted when he could so ill afford it; while Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap were racking their brains, and, from time to time, those of Messrs. Mortmain and Frankpledge, to discover some instrument strong and large enough to cut a fat slice for themselves out of the fortune they were endeavouring, for that purpose, to put within the reach of Mr. Titmouse. Some two or three nights after the little transaction between the two friends which I have been describing, Huckaback called upon Titmouse, and after greeting him rather cordially, told him that he had come to put him up to a trick upon the Saffron Hill people, that would tickle them into a little activity in his affairs. The trick was—the sending a letter to those gentlemen calculated to—but why attempt to characterize it? I have the original document lying before me, which was sent by Titmouse the very next morning to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and here follows a *verbatim* copy of it.

"No. 9, Closet Court, Oxford Street.

"To Messrs. QUIRK & Co.

"Gents,—Am sorry to Trouble You, But Being *Drove quite desperate* at my Troubles (which have bro^t me to my Last Penny a Week^{ago}) and Mrs. Squallop my Landlady w^d distrain on Me only that There Is nothing to distrain on, Am Determined to Go Abroad in a Week's Time, and shall Never come Any More back again with Great Grief w^h Is What I now Write To tell You Of (Hoping you will please Take No notice of It) So Need give Yourselves No Further Concern with my Concerns Seeing The Estate is Not To Be Had and Am Sorry you Sh^d Have Had so Much trouble with My Affairs w^h c^d not Help.

Sh^d have Much liked The Thing, only it Was Not worth Stopping For, or Would, but Since It Was not God's Will be Done *which it will*. Hav^s raised a Trifle On my Future Prospects (w^h am Certain There is Nothing In) from a *True Friend*" [need it be guessed at whose instance these words found their way into the letter?] "w^h was certainly uncommon inconvenient to That Person But He w^d do Anything to Do me good As he says Am going to raise A Little More from a Gent That does *Things of That Nature* w^h will help me with Expense in Going Abroad (which place I Never mean to Return from). Have fixed for the 10th To Go on w^h Day Shall Take leave of Mr. Tag-rag (who on my Return Shall be glad to See Buried or in the Workhouse). Have wrote This letter Only to Save Y^r Respectable Selves trouble w^h Trust You w^d not have Taken.

"And Remain, Gents, Y^r humble Unworthy servant

T. TITMOUSE.

"P.S.—Hope you will Particularly Remember me to Mr. Gammon. What is to become of me, know nothing, being so troubled. Am Humbly Determined not to employ any Gents in This matter except y^r most Respectable House, and s^d be most Truly sorry to Go Abroad wh^h *am Really often thinking of in Earnest*. (Unless something Speedily Turns Up, favourable). T. T.—Sh^d like (By the way) to know if you sh^d be so Disposed what y^r resp^e house w^d take for my Chances Down (*Out and out*) In a Round Sum (*Ready Money*). And hope if they Write It will be by Next Post or Shall be Gone Abroad."

Old Mr. Quirk, as soon as he had finished the perusal of this skilful document, started, a little disturbed, from his seat, and bustled into Mr. Gammon's room with Mr. Titmouse's open letter in his hand.—"Gammon," said he, "just cast your eye over this, will you? Really, we must look after that Titmouse, or he'll be gone!" Mr. Gammon took the letter rather eagerly, read deliberately through it, and then looked up at his fidgety partner, who stood anxiously eyeing him, and smiled. "Well, Gammon, I really think—ch? Don't you—" "Upon my word, Mr. Quirk, this nearly equals his former letter; and it also seems to have produced on you the desired effect." "Well, Gammon, and what of that? Because my heart don't happen to be *quite* a piece of flint, you're always—" "You might have been a far wealthier man than you are but for that soft heart of yours, Mr. Quirk," said Gammon with a bland smile. (!) "I know I might, Gammon—I know it. I thank my God I'm not so keen after business that I can't feel for this poor soul—really, his state's quite deplorable!" "Then, my dear sir, put your hand into your pocket at once, as I was suggesting last night, and allow him a weekly sum." "A—hem! hem! Gammon"—said Quirk, sitting down, thrusting his hands into his waistcoat pockets, and looking very earnestly at Gammon. "Well, then," replied that gentleman, shrugging his shoulders, in answer to the mute appeal—"write and say you *won't*—'tis soon done, and so the matter ends." "Why, Gammon, you see, if he goes abroad," said Quirk, after a long pause—"we lose him for ever" "Pho!—go abroad! He's too much for you, Mr. Quirk—he is indeed, ha, ha!" "You're fond of a laugh at my expense, Gammon; it's quite pleasant—you can't think how I like that same laugh of yours!"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Quirk—but you really misunderstand me; I was laughing only at the absurd inconsistency of the fellow; he's a most transparent little fool, and takes *us* for such. Go abroad! Ridiculous pretence!—In his precious postscript he undoes all—he says he is only often *thinking* of going—pshaw!—That the wretch is in great distress, is very probable; but it must go hard with him before he either commits suicide or goes abroad, I warrant him: I've no fears on *that* score—but there *is* a point in the letter that may be worth considering—I mean the fellow's hint about borrowing money on his prospects."

"Yes, to be sure—the very thing that struck *me*." [Gammon faintly smiled.] "I never thought much about the *other* part of the letter—all stuff about going abroad—pho!—But to be sure, if he's trying to raise money, he may get into keen hands.—Do you really think he *has*?"

"Oh no—of course it's only a little lie of his—or he must have found out some greater fool than himself, which I had not supposed possible. But however that may be, I really think, Mr. Quirk, it's high time that we should take some decided step."

"Well,—yes, it may be," said Quirk, slowly—"and I must say that Mortmain encouraged me a good deal the day before yesterday." "Well, and you know what Mr. Frankpledge—" "Oh, as to Frankpledge—hem!" "What of Mr. Frankpledge, Mr. Quirk?" inquired Gammon, rather tartly.

"There? There!—Always the way—but what does it signify? Come come, Gammon, we know each other too well to quarrel!—I don't mean anything disrespectful to Mr. Frankpledge, but when Mortmain has been one's conveyancer these twenty years, and never once—hem!—but, however, he tells me that we are now standing on sure ground, or that he don't know what sure ground is, and sees no objection to our even taking preliminary steps in the matter, which indeed I begin to think it high time to do!—And as for securing ourselves in respect of any advances to Titmouse—he suggests our taking a bond, conditioned,—say, for the payment of £500 or £1,000 on demand, under cover of which one might advance him, you know, just such sums *as*, and when we pleased; one could stop when one thought fit; one could begin with three or four pounds a-week, and increase as his prospects improved—eh!"

"You know *I've* no objection to such an arrangement; but consider, Mr. Quirk, we must have patience; it will take a long while to get our verdict, you know, and perhaps as long to *secure* it afterwards; and this horrid little wretch all the while on our hands; what the deuce to do with him, I really don't know!" "Humph, humph!" grunted Quirk, looking very earnestly and uneasily at Gammon. "And what I chiefly fear is this,—suppose he should get dissatisfied with the amount of our advances, and, knowing the state and prospects of the cause, should *then* turn restive?" "Ay, confound it, Gammon, all that should be looked to, shouldn't it?" interrupted Quirk, with an exceedingly chagrined air. "To be sure," continued Gammon thoughtfully; "by that time he may have got substantial friends about him, whom he could persuade to become security to us for further and past advances."

"Nay, now you name the thing, Gammon; it was what I was thinking of only the other day:" he dropped his voice—"Isn't there one or two of our own clients, hem!—" "Why, certainly, there's old Fang; I don't think it impossible he might be induced to do a little usury—it's all he lives for, Mr. Quirk; and the security is good in reality, though perhaps not exactly marketable." "Nay; but, on second thoughts, why not do it *myself*, if anything *can* be made of it?" "That, however, will be for future consideration. In the mean time, we'd better send for Titmouse, and manage him a little more—discreetly, eh? We did not exactly hit it off last time, did we, Mr. Quirk?" said Gammon, smiling rather sarcastically. "We must keep him at Tag-rag's, if the thing *can* be done for the present, at all events." "To be sure; he couldn't then come buzzing about us, like a gad-fly; he'd drive us mad in a week, I'm sure."

"Oh, I'd rather give up everything than submit to it. It can't be difficult for us, I should think, to bind him to our own terms—to put a bridle in the ass's mouth? Let us say that we insist on his signing an undertaking to act implicitly according to our directions in everything." "Ay, to be sure; on pain of our instantly turning him to the right about. I fancy it will do now!"

"And, now, Mr. Quirk," said Gammon, with as much of peremptoriness in his tone as he could venture upon to Mr. Quirk, "you really must do me the favour to leave the management of this little wretch to me. You see, he seems to have taken—Heaven save the mark!—a fancy to me, poor fellow!—and—and—it must be owned, we miscarried sadly, the other night, on a certain grand occasion—eh?" Quirk shook his head dissentingly.

"Well, then," continued Gammon, "one thing I am determined on: one or the other of us shall undertake Titmouse, solely and singly. Pray, for Heaven's sake, tackle him yourself—a disagreeable duty! You know, my dear sir, how invariably I leave everything of real importance and difficulty to your very superior tact and experience." "Come, come, Gammon, that's a drop of sweet oil——"

Quirk might well say so, for he felt its softening, smoothing effects already. "Upon my word and honour, Mr. Quirk, I'm in earnest. Pshaw!—and you must know it. I know you too well, my dear sir, to attempt to——" "Certainly, I must say, those must get up *very* early that can find Caleb Quirk napping."

Gammon felt at that moment that for several years *he* must have been a very early riser. And so the matter was arranged in the manner which Gammon had wished and determined upon, *i.e.*, that Mr. Titmouse should be left entirely to his management; and, after some little discussion as to the meditated advances, the partners parted. On entering his own room, Quirk closing his door, stood leaning against the side of the window, with his hands in his pockets, and his eyes instinctively resting on his banker's book, which lay on the table. He was in a very brown study: the subject on which his thoughts were busied being the prudence or imprudence of leaving Titmouse thus in the hands of Gammon. It might be all very well for Quirk to *assert* his self-confidence when in Gammon's presence, but he did not really feel it. He never left Gammon after any little difference of opinion, however friendly, without a secret suspicion that somehow or another Gammon had been too much for him, and always gained his purposes, without giving Quirk any handle of dissatisfaction. In fact, Quirk was thoroughly afraid of Gammon, and Gammon knew it. In the present instance, an undefinable but increasing suspicion and dissatisfaction forced him presently back again into Gammon's room.

"I say, Gammon, you understand, eh?—*Fair play*, you know," he commenced, with a shy embarrassed air, ill concealed under a forced smile.

"Pray, Mr. Quirk, what may be your meaning?" inquired Gammon with unusual tartness, with an astonished air, and blushing violently, which was not surprising; for ever since Quirk had quitted him, Gammon's thoughts had been occupied with only one question, *viz.*, how he should go to work with Titmouse to satisfy him that he (Gammon) was the only member of the firm that had a real disinterested regard for him, and so acquire a valuable control over him. Thus occupied, the observation of Quirk had completely taken Gammon aback; and he lost his presence of mind, of course his temper quickly following. "Will you favour me, Mr. Quirk, with an explanation of your extraordinarily absurd and offensive observation?" said he, reddening more and more as he looked at Mr. Quirk.

"You've a queer hand, Gammon," replied Quirk, with almost an equally surprised and embarrassed air, for he could not resist a sort of conviction that Gammon had fathomed what had been passing in his mind.

"What did you mean, Mr. Quirk, by your singular observation just now?" said Gammon calmly, having recovered his presence of mind. "Mean? Why, that—we're *both* queer hands, Gammon, ha, ha, ha?" answered Quirk, with an anxious laugh. "I shall leave Titmouse entirely—*entirely*, Mr. Quirk, in your

hands ; I will have nothing whatever to do with him. I am quite sick of him and his affairs already ; I cannot bring myself to undertake such an affair, and that was what I was thinking of,—when——” “Eh? indeed! Well, to be sure! Only think!” said Quirk, dropping his voice, looking to see that the two doors were shut, and resuming the chair which he had lately quitted. “What do you think has been occurring to *me* in my own room, just now? Whether it would suit us better to throw this monkey overboard, put ourselves confidently in communication with the party in possession, and tell him that—hem!—for a—eh? You understand?—a con-si-de-ra-tion—a *suitable* con-si-de-ra-tion.” “Mr. Quirk! Heavens!” Gammon was really amazed. “Well? You needn’t open your eyes so very wide, Mr. Gammon—why shouldn’t it be done? You know we shouldn’t be satisfied with a trifle, of course. But suppose he’d agree to buy our silence with four or five thousand pounds; really, it’s well worth considering! Upon my soul, Gammon, it *is* a hard thing on him; no fault of his, and it is very hard for him to turn out, and for such a—eugh!—such a wretch as Titmouse; you’d feel it yourself, Gammon, if you were in his place, and I’m sure you’d think that four or five thous——” “But is not Titmouse our *Poor Neighbour*?” said Gammon, with a sly smile. “Why, that’s only one way of looking at it, Gammon! Perhaps the man we are going to eject does a vast deal of good with the property; certainly he bears a very high name in the county—and fancy Titmouse with ten thousand a-year!——” “Mr. Quirk, Mr. Quirk, it’s not to be thought of for a moment—not for a moment,” interrupted Gammon seriously, and even somewhat peremptorily—“nothing should persuade *me* to be any party to such——”

At this moment Snap burst into the room with a heated appearance, and a chagrined air—“*Pitch v. Grub*——”

[This was a little pet action of poor Snap’s: it was for slander uttered by the defendant (an ostler) against the plaintiff (a waterman on a coach-stand), charging the plaintiff with having *the mange*, on account of which a woman refused to marry him.] “*Pitch v. Grub*—just been tried at Guildhall. Witness bang up to the mark—words and special damage proved; slapping speech from Serjeant Shout. Verdict for plaintiff—but only one farthing; and Lord Widdrington said, as the jury had given one farthing for damages, *he* would give him another for costs, and that would make a halfpenny; on which the defendant’s attorney tendered me—a halfpenny on the spot. Laughter in court—move for new trial first day of next term, and tip his lordship a rattler in the next Sunday’s *Flash*!”

“Mr. Quirk, once for all, if these kind of actions are to go on, I’ll leave the firm, come what will.” [It flickered across his mind that Titmouse would be a capital client to start with on his own account.] “I protest our names will quite stink in the profession.” “Good, Mr. Gammon, good!” interposed Snap, warmly; “your little action for the usury penalties the other day came off so uncommon well!” “Let me tell you, Mr. Snap,” interrupted Gammon, reddening—“Pho! Come! Can’t be helped—fortune of the war,”—interrupted the head of the firm—“*Is Pitch solvent*?—of course we’ve security for costs out of pocket.”

Now, the fact was, that poor Snap had picked up Pitch at one of the police offices, and, in his zeal for business, had undertaken his case on pure speculation, relying on the apparent strength of the plaintiff’s case—Pitch being only a waterman attached to a coach-stand. When, therefore, the very ominous question of Mr. Quirk met Snap’s ear, he suddenly happened (at least, he thought so) to hear himself called for from the clerks’ room, and bolted out of Mr. Gammon’s room rather unceremoniously.

“Snap will be the ruin of the firm, Mr. Quirk,” said Gammon, with an air of disgust. “But I really must get on with the brief I’m drawing: so, Mr.

Quirk, we can talk about Titmouse to-morrow !” The brief he was drawing up was for a defendant who was going to non-suit the plaintiff (a man with a large family, who had kindly lent the defendant a considerable sum of money), solely because of the *want of a stamp*.

Quirk differed in opinion with Gammon, and, as he resumed his seat at his desk, he could not help writing the words, “*Quirk and Snap*,” and thinking how well such a firm would sound and work—for Snap was verily a chip of the old block !

On Friday night, the 28th July 18—, the state of Mr. Titmouse’s affairs was this ; he owed his landlady £1 9s. ; his washerwoman, 6s. ; his tailor £1 8s.—in all, three guineas ; besides 10s. to Huckaback (Tittlebat’s notion was, that on re-payment at any time of 10s., Huckaback would be bound to deliver up to him the document or voucher which he had given him), and a weekly accruing rent of 7s. to his landlady, besides some very small sums for washing, tea, bread, and butter, etc. To meet these serious liabilities, he had—*not one farthing*.

On returning to his lodgings that night, he found a line from Thumbscrew, his landlady’s broker, informing him that, unless by ten o’clock on the next morning his arrears of rent were paid, he should distrain, and she would also give him notice to quit at the end of the week : that nothing could induce her to give him further time. He sat down in dismay on reading this threatening document ; and, in sitting down, his eye fell on a bit of paper lying on the floor, which must have been thrust under the door. From the marks on it, it was evident that he must have trod upon it in entering. It proved to be a summons from the Court of Requests, for £1 8s. due to Job Cox, his tailor. He deposited it mechanically on the table ; and for a minute he dared hardly breathe.

This seemed something really like a *crisis*.

After a silent agony of half an hour’s duration, he rose trembling from his chair, blew out his candle, and, in a few minutes’ time, might have been seen standing with a pale and troubled face before the window of old Balls, the pawnbroker, peering through the suspended articles—watches, sugar-tongs, rings, brooches, spoons, pins, bracelets, knives and forks, seals, chains, etc.—to see whether any one else than old Balls were within. Having at length watched out a very pale and wretched-looking woman, Titmouse entered to take her place ; and after interchanging a few faltering words with the white-haired and hard-hearted old pawnbroker, produced his guard-chain, his breast-pin, and his ring, and obtained three pounds two shillings and sixpence on the security of them. With this sum he slunk out of the shop, and calling on Cox, his tailor, paid his trembling old creditor the full amount of his claim (£1 8s.) together with 4s., the expense of the summons—simply asking for a receipt, without uttering another word, for he felt almost choked. In the same way he dealt with Mrs. Squallop, his landlady—not uttering one word in reply to her profuse and voluble apologies, but pressing his lips between his teeth till the blood came from them, while his heart seemed bursting within him. Then he walked upstairs, with a desperate air—with eighteenpence in his pocket—*all his ornaments gone*—his washerwoman yet unpaid—his rent going on—several other little matters unsettled ; and the 10th of August approaching, when he expected to be penniless from Mr. Tag-rag’s, and thrown on his own resources for subsistence. When he had regained his room, and, having shut the door, had re-seated himself at his table, he felt for a moment as if he could have yelled. Starvation and Despair, two fiends, seemed sitting besides him in shadowy ghastliness chilling and palsyng him—petrifying his heart within him.—*What was he to do ?* Why had he been born ? Why was he so much more persecuted and miserable than any one else ? Visions of his ring, his breast

pin, his studs stuck in a bit of card, with their price written above them, and hanging exposed to his view in old Balls' window, almost frenzied him. Thoughts such as these at length began to suggest others of a dreadful nature. * * * A sharp knock at the door startled him out of the stupor into which he was sinking. He listened for a moment, as if he were not certain that the sound was a real one. There seemed a ton-weight upon his heart, which a mighty sigh could lift for an instant, but not remove; and he was in the act of heaving a second such sigh, as he languidly opened the door—expecting to encounter Mr. Thumbscrew, or some of his myrmidons, who might not know of his recent settlement with his landlady.

"Is this Mr.—Tit—Titmouse's?" inquired a genteel-looking young man.

"Yes," replied Titmouse, sadly. "Are you Mr. Titmouse?" "Yes," he replied, more faintly than before. "Oh—I have brought you, sir, a letter from Mr. Gammon, of the firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, solicitors, Saffron Hill," said the stranger, unconscious that his words shot a flash of light into a little abyss of sorrow before him. "He begged me to give this letter into your own hands, and said he hoped you'd send him an answer by the first morning's post."

"Yes—oh—I see, certainly—to be sure—with pleasure—how is Mr. Gammon?—uncommon kind of him—very humble respects to him—take care to answer it," stammered Titmouse in a breath, hardly knowing whether he was standing on his head or his heels, and not quite certain where he was.

"Good evening, sir," replied the stranger, evidently a little surprised at Titmouse's manner, and withdrew. Titmouse shut his door. With prodigious trepidation of hand and flutter of spirits, he opened the letter—an enclosure meeting his eyes in the shape of a bank-note.

"Oh Lord!" he murmured, turning white as the sheet of paper he held. Then the letter dropped from his hand, and he stood as if stupefied for some moments; but presently rapture darted through him; a five-pound bank-note was in his hand, and it had been enclosed in the following letter:—

"35 *Thavies*^A *Inn*, 29th July 18—.

"MY DEAR MR. TITMOUSE,—Your last note, addressed to our firm, has given me the greatest pain, and I hasten, on my return from the country, to forward you the enclosed trifle, which I sincerely hope will be of temporary service to you. May I beg the favour of your company on Sunday evening next, at seven o'clock, to take a glass of wine with me? I shall be quite alone and disengaged; and may have it in my power to make you some important communications, concerning matters in which, I assure you, I feel a very deep interest on your account. Begging the favour of an early answer to-morrow morning, I trust you will believe me, ever, my dear sir, your most faithful humble servant,

"OILY GAMMON.

"TITLLEBAT TITMOUSE, ESQ."

The first balmy drop of the long-expected golden shower had at length fallen upon the panting Titmouse. How polite—nay, how affectionate and respectful—was the note of Mr. Gammon! and, for the first time in his life, he saw himself addressed, "TITLLEBAT TITMOUSE, ESQUIRE." If his room had been large enough to admit of it, Titmouse would have skipped round it again and again in his frantic ecstasy. Having at length read over and over again the blessed letter of Mr. Gammon, he hastily folded it up, crumpled up the bank-note in his hand, clapped his hat on his head, blew out his candle, rushed downstairs as if a mad-dog were at his heels, and in three or four minutes' time was standing breathless before old Balls, whom he had almost

electrified by asking, with an eager and joyous air, for a return of the articles which he had only an hour before pawned with him ; at the same time lying down the duplicates and the bank-note. The latter, old Balls scrutinized with most anxious exactment, and even suspicion—but it seemed perfectly unexceptionable ; so he gave him back his precious ornaments, and the change out of the note, *minus* a trifling sum for interest. Titmouse then started off at top speed to Huckaback ; but it suddenly occurring to him as possible that that gentleman, on hearing of his good fortune, might look for an immediate repayment of the ten shillings he had recently lent to Titmouse, he stopped short—paused—and returned home. There he had hardly been seated a moment, when down he pelted again, to buy a sheet of paper and a wafer or two, to write his letter to Mr. Gammon ; which having obtained, he returned at the same speed, almost overturning his fat landlady, who looked after him as if he were a mad cat scampering up and down-stairs, and fearing that he had gone suddenly crazy. The note he wrote to Mr. Gammon was so exceedingly extravagant, that, candid as I have (I trust) hitherto shown myself in the delineation of Mr. Titmouse's character, I cannot bring myself to give the said letter to the reader—making all allowances for the extraordinary excitement of its writer.

By six o'clock the next morning, Titmouse had, with his own hand, dropped his answer into the letter-box upon the door of Mr. Gammon's chambers in Thavies' Inn ; in which answer he had, with numerous expressions of profound respect and gratitude, accepted Mr. Gammon's polite invitation. A very happy man felt Titmouse, as he returned to Oxford Street ; entering Messrs. Tag-rag's premises with alacrity, just as they were being opened, and volunteering his assistance in numerous things beyond his usual province, with singular briskness and energy ; as if conscious that by doing so he was greatly gratifying Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, whose wishes upon the subject he knew. He displayed such unwonted cheerfulness and patient good-nature throughout the day, that one of his companions, a serious youth, in a white neckerchief, black clothes, and with a sanctified countenance—the only professing pious person in the establishment—took an occasion to ask him, in a mysterious whisper, "whether he had got *converted* ;" and whether he would, at six o'clock in the morning, accompany the speaker to a room in the neighbourhood, where he (the youth aforesaid) was going to conduct an exhortation and prayer meeting ! Titmouse refused—but not without a few qualms ; for luck certainly seemed to be smiling on him, and he felt that he ought to be grateful for it ; but then, he at length reflected, the proper place for that sort of thing would be a regular church—to which he resolved to go. This change of manners Tag-rag, however, looked upon as assumed only to affront *him* ; seeing nothing but impertinence and defiance in all that Titmouse did—as if the nearer Titmouse got to the end of his bondage—*i. e.*, the 10th of August—the lighter hearted he grew. He resolved religiously to keep his counsel ; to avoid even—at all events for the present—communicating with Huckaback.

On the ensuing Sunday he rose at an earlier hour than usual, and took nearly twice as long a time as usual to dress—by reason of his often falling into many delightful reveries. By eleven o'clock he might have been seen entering the gallery of St. Andrew's Church, Holborn ; where he considered that doubtless Mr. Gammon, who lived in the neighbourhood, might attend. He asked three or four pew-openers, both below and above, if they knew which was Mr. Gammon's pew—Mr. Gammon of Thavies' Inn ; not dreaming of presumptuously going to the pew, but of sitting in some place that commanded a view of it. Mr. Gammon, I need hardly say, was quite unknown there—no one had ever heard of such a person : nevertheless Titmouse, albeit a little galled at being, in spite of his elegant appearance, slipped into a back pew, remained—but his

thoughts wandered grievously the whole time. The service over, he sauntered in the direction of Hyde Park, to saunter in which he seemed now to have a sort of *claim*. How soon might he become, instead of a mere spectator as heretofore, a partaker in its glories! The dawn of the day of fortune was on his long-benighted soul; and he could hardly subdue his excited feelings. Punctual to his appointment, as the clock struck seven he made his appearance at Mr. Gammon's, with a pair of span-new white kid gloves on, and was speedily ushered, a little flurried, by a comfortable-looking elderly female servant, into Mr. Gammon's room. Mr. Titmouse was dressed just as when he was first presented to the reader, sallying forth into Oxford Street. Mr. Gammon, who was sitting reading the *Sunday Flash* at a table on which stood a couple of decanters, several wine-glasses, and two or three dishes of fruit, rose and received his distinguished visitor with the most delightful affability.

"I am most happy, Mr. Titmouse, to see you in this friendly way," said he shaking him by the hand. "Oh don't name it, sir," quoth Titmouse rather indistinctly, and hastily running his hand through his hair. "I've nothing, you see, to offer you but a little fruit, and a glass of fair port or sherry."

"Particular fond of *them*, sir," replied Titmouse, endeavouring to clear his throat; for in spite of a strong effort to appear at his ease, he was unsuccessful; so that, when Gammon's keen eye glanced at the bedizened figure of his guest, a bitter smile passed over his face, without having been observed. *This*, thought he, as his eye passed from the ring glittering on the little finger of the right hand, to the studs and breast-pin in the shirt front, and thence to the guard-chain glaring entirely outside a damson-coloured satin waistcoat, and the spotless white glove which yet glistened on the left hand—"This is the writer of the dismal epistle of the other day, announcing his desperation and destitution!"

"Your health, Mr. Titmouse!—help yourself!" said Mr. Gammon, in a cheerful and cordial tone; Titmouse pouring out a glass only three-quarters full, raised it to his lips with a slightly tremulous hand, and returned Mr. Gammon's salutation. When had Titmouse tasted a glass of wine before?—a reflection occurring not only to himself, but also to Gammon, to whom it was a circumstance that might be serviceable.

"You see, Mr. Titmouse, mine's only a small bachelor's establishment, and I cannot put my old servant out of the way by having my friends to dinner"—[quite forgetting that the day before he had entertained at least six friends, including Mr. Frankpledge—but the idea of going through a dinner *with Mr. Titmouse!*]

And now, O inexperienced Titmouse! unacquainted with the potent qualities of wine, I warn you to be cautious how you drink many glasses, for you cannot calculate the effect which they will have upon you; and, indeed, methinks that with this man you have a game to play which will not admit of much wine being drunk.

"Oh, sir, 'pon my honour, beg you won't name it—all one to me, sir!—Beautiful wine this, sir." "Pretty fair, I think—certainly rather old;—but what fruit will you take—currants or cherries?" "Why—a—I've so lately dined," replied Titmouse, alluding to an exceedingly slight repast at a coffee-shop about two o'clock. He would have preferred the cherries, but did not feel quite at his ease how to dispose of the stones nicely—gracefully—so he took a very few red currants upon his plate, and eat them slowly, and with a modest air.

"Well, Mr. Titmouse," commenced Gammon with an air of concern, "I was really much distressed by your last letter." "Uncommon glad to hear it, sir—knew you would, sir—you're so kindhearted;—all quite true, sir?" "I had no idea that you were reduced to such straits," said Gammon in a sym-

pathizing tone, but settling his eye involuntarily on the ring of Titmouse. "Quite dreadful, sir—'pon my soul, dreadful; and such usage at Mr. Tag-rag's!" "But you mustn't think of going abroad—away from all your friends, Mr. Titmouse." "*Abroad, sir!*" interrupted Titmouse with anxious but subdued eagerness; "never thought of such a thing!" "Oh! I—I thought——" "There isn't a word of truth in it, sir; and if you've heard so, it must have been from that audacious fellow that called on you—he's *such* a liar—if you knew him as well as I do, sir!" said Titmouse with a confident air, quite losing sight of his letter to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—"No sir—shall stay, and stick to friends that stick to me."

"Take another glass of wine, Mr. Titmouse," interrupted Gammon cordially, and Titmouse obeyed him; but while he was pouring it out, a sudden recollection of his letter flashing across his mind, satisfied him that he stood detected in a flat lie before Mr. Gammon; and he blushed scarlet.

"Do you like the sherry?" inquired Gammon, perfectly aware of what was passing through the mind of his guest, and wishing to divert his thoughts. Titmouse answered in the affirmative; and proceeded to pour forth such a number of apologies for his own behaviour at Saffron Hill, and that of Huckaback on the subsequent occasion, as Gammon found it difficult to stop, over and over again assuring him that all had been forgiven and forgotten. When Titmouse came to the remittance of the five pounds—"Don't mention it, my dear sir," interrupted Gammon very blandly; "It gave me, I assure you, far greater satisfaction to send it, than you to receive it. I hope it has a little relieved you?" "I think so, sir! I was, 'pon my life, on my very last legs."

"When things come to the worst, they often mend, Mr. Titmouse! I told Mr. Quirk (who, to do him justice, came at last into my views) that, however premature, and perhaps imprudent it might be in us to go so far, I could not help relieving your present necessities, even out of my own resources." [Oh, Gammon, Gammon!] "How uncommon kind of you, sir!" exclaimed Titmouse.

"Not in the least, my dear sir—(pray fill another glass, Mr. Titmouse!) You see Mr. Quirk is quite a man of business—and our profession too often affords instances of persons whose hearts contract as their purses expand, Mr. Titmouse—ha! ha! Indeed, those who make their money as hard as Mr. Quirk, are apt to be slow at parting with it, and *very* suspicious."

"Well, I hope no offence, sir; but really I thought as much, directly I saw that old gent." "Ah—but *now* he is embarked, heart and soul, in the affair." "No! *Is* he really, sir?" inquired Titmouse, eagerly.

"That is," replied Gammon quickly, "so long as I am at his elbow, urging him on—for he wants some one who—hem! In fact, my dear sir, ever since I had the good fortune to make the discovery, which happily brought us acquainted with each other, Mr. Titmouse," [it was old Quirk who had made the discovery, and Gammon had for a long time thrown cold water on it,] "I have been doing all I could with him, and I trust I may say, have at last got the thing into shape."

"I'll take my oath, sir," said Titmouse excitedly, "I never was so much struck with any one in all my born days as I was with you, sir, when you first came to my emp—to Mr. Tag-rag's sir—Lord, sir, how uncommon sharp you seemed!" Gammon smiled with a deprecating air, and sipped his wine in silence; but there was great sweetness in the expression of his countenance. Poor Titmouse's doubts, hopes, and fears, were rapidly subsiding into a *reverence* for Gammon!

"I certainly quite agree with Mr. Quirk," said Gammon presently, "that the difficulties in our way are of the most serious description. To speak, for

an instant only, of the risk we ourselves incur personally—would you believe it, my dear Mr. Titmouse?—in such a disgraceful state are our laws, that we can't gratify our feelings by taking up your cause, without rendering ourselves liable to imprisonment for Heaven knows how long, and a fine that would be ruin itself, if we should be found out!" Titmouse continued silent, his wine-glass in his hand arrested in its way to his mouth; which, together with his eyes, were opened to their widest extent, as he stared with a kind of terror upon Mr. Gammon.—"Are we, then, unreasonable, my dear sir, in entreating you to be cautious—nay, in insisting on your compliance with our wishes, in all that we shall deem prudent and necessary, when not only your own best interests, but our characters, liberties, and fortunes are staked on the issue of this great enterprise? I am sure," continued Gammon, with great emotion, "you will feel for us, Mr. Titmouse. I see you do!" Gammon put his hand over his eyes, in order, apparently, to conceal his emotion, but really to observe what effect he had produced upon Titmouse.

The conjoint influence of Gammon's wine and eloquence not a little agitated Titmouse, in whose eyes stood tears. "I'll do anything—anything, sir," he almost sobbed. "Oh! all we wish is to be allowed to serve you effectually and to enable us to do that—" "Tell me to get into a soot-bag, and lie hid in a coal-hole, and see if I won't do it!" "What! a coal-hole? Would you, then, even stop at Tag-rag and Co.'s?"

"Ye-e-e-s, sir—hem! hem! That is, till the *tenth* of next month, when my time's up." "Ay!—ay!—oh, I understand! Another glass, Mr. Titmouse," said Gammon, pouring himself out some more wine; and observing, while Titmouse followed his example, that there was an unsteadiness in his motions of a very different description from that which he had exhibited at the commencement of the evening—at the same time wondering what the deuce they should do with him after the *tenth* of August.

"You see, I have the utmost confidence in you, and had so from the first happy moment when we met; but Mr. Quirk is rather sus—In short, to prevent misunderstanding (as he says), Mr. Quirk is anxious that you should give a *written* promise." (Titmouse looked eagerly about for writing materials.) "No, not now, but in a day or two's time. I confess, my dear Mr. Titmouse, if I might have decided on the matter, I should have been satisfied with your verbal promise; but, I must say, Mr. Quirk's grey hairs seem to have made him quite—eh? you understand? Don't you think so, Mr. Titmouse?" "To be sure! 'pon my honour, Mr. Gammon!" replied Titmouse; not very distinctly understanding, however, what he was so energetically assenting to.

"I dare say you wonder why we wish you to stop a few months longer at your present hiding-place—at Tag-rag's?" "Can't, possibly!—after the *tenth* of next month, sir," replied Titmouse, eagerly.

"But as soon as we begin to fire off our guns against the enemy—Lord, my dear sir, if they could only find out, you know, where to get at you—you would never live to enjoy your ten thousand a-year! They'd either poison or kidnap you—get you out of the way, unless you keep out of *their* way: and if you will but consent to keep snug at Tag-rag's for a while, who'd suspect where you was? We could easily arrange with your friend Tag-rag that you should—" "My stars! I'd give something to hear you tell Tag-rag—why, I wonder what he'll do." "Make you very comfortable, and let you have your own way in everything—that you may rely upon!"

"Go to the play, for instance, whenever I want, and do all that sort of thing?"

"Nay, try! anything!—And as for money, I've persuaded Mr. Quirk to consent to our advancing you a certain sum per week, from the present time

while the cause is going on"—(Titmouse's heart began to beat fast)—"in order to place you above absolute inconvenience; and when you consider the awful sums we shall have to disburse—cash out of pocket—(the tongues of counsel, you know, are set on gold springs, and only gold keys open their lips!)—for court-fees, and other indispensable matters, I should candidly say that four thousand pounds of hard cash out of pocket, advanced by our firm in your case, would be the very lowest." (Titmouse stared at him with an expression of stupid wonder.) "Yes—four thousand pounds, Mr. Titmouse, at the very least—the *very* least." Again he paused, keenly scrutinizing Titmouse's features by the light of the candles, which just then were brought in. "You seem surprised, Mr. Titmouse."

"Why—why—where's all the money to come from, sir?" exclaimed Titmouse, aghast.

"Ah! that is indeed a fearful question," replied Gammon, with a very serious air; "but at my request, our firm has agreed to make the necessary advances; and also (for *I* could not bear the sight of your distress, Mr. Titmouse!) to supply your necessities liberally in the meantime, as I was saying."

"Won't you take another glass of wine, Mr. Gammon?" suddenly inquired Titmouse, with a confident air. "With all my heart, Mr. Titmouse! I'm delighted that you approve of it. I paid enough for it, I can warrant you." "Cuss me if ever I tasted such wine! Uncommon! Come—no heel-taps, Mr. Gammon—here goes—let's drink—success to the affair!" "With all my heart, my dear sir—with all my heart. Success to the thing—amen!" and Gammon drained his glass; so did Titmouse. "Ah! Mr. Titmouse, you'll soon have wine enough to float a frigate—and indeed what not—with ten thousand a-year?" "And all the back-rents, you know—ha, ha!" "Yes—to be sure!—the back-rents! The sweetest estate that is to be found in all Yorkshire! Gracious, Mr. Titmouse!" continued Gammon, with an excited air—"What may you not do? Go where you like—do what you like—get into Parliament—marry some lovely woman!" "Lord, Mr. Gammon!—you a'n't dreaming? Nor I? But now, in course, *you* must be paid handsome for your trouble!—Only say how much—Name your sum! What you please! You only give all you've said." "For my part I wish to rely entirely on your mere word of honour. Between gentlemen, you know—my dear sir—" "You only try me, sir." "But you see, Mr. Quirk's getting old, and naturally is anxious to provide for those whom he will leave behind him—and so Mr. Snap agreed with him—two to one against me, Mr. Titmouse—of course they carried the day—two to one." "Only say the figure, sir!" cried Titmouse, eagerly. "A single year's income, only—ten thousand pounds will hardly"—"Ten thousand pounds! By jingo, that *is* a slice out of the cake! Oh, Lord!" quoth Titmouse, looking aghast. "A mere crumb, my dear sir!—a trifle! Why, *we* are going to give *you* that sum at least every year—and indeed it was suggested to our firm, that unless you gave us at least a sum of twenty-five thousand pounds—in fact, we were recommended to look out for some other heir."

"Oh dear! oh, Mr. Gammon," cried Titmouse, hastily—"it's not to be thought of, sir!" "So I said; and as for throwing it up—to be sure we shall have ourselves to borrow large sums to carry on the war—and unless we have your bond for at least ten thousand pounds, we cannot raise a farthing." "Well—curse me, if you sha'n't do what you like!—Give me your hand, and do what you like, Mr. Gammon!"

"Thank you, Mr. Titmouse! How I like a glass of wine with a friend in this quiet way!—you'll always find me rejoiced to show—" "Your hand! By George—Didn't I take a liking to you from the first? But to speak my mind a bit—as for Mr. Quirk—excuse me—but he's a cur—cur—cur—mudg—mudg—mudg—eon—hem!"

"Hope you've not been so imprudent, my dear Titmouse," threw in Mr. Gammon, rather anxiously, "as to borrow money—eh?"

"Devil knows, and devil cares! No stamp, I know—bang up to the mark"—here he winked an eye, and put his finger to his nose—"wide awake—Huck—uck—uck—uck! how his name sti—sticks. Your hand, Mr. Gammon—here—this, this way—what are you bobbing your head about for? Ah, ha!—The floor—'pon my life!—how funny—it's like being at sea—up, down—oh dear!"—he clapped his hand to his head.

[Pythagoras has finely observed, that a man is not to be considered dead drunk till he lies on the floor, and stretches out his arms and legs to prevent his going lower.] See-saw, see-saw, up and down, up and down, went everything about him. Now he felt sinking through the floor, then gently rising to the ceiling. Mr. Gammon seemed getting into a mist, and waving about the candles in it. Mr. Titmouse's head swam; his chair seemed to be resting on the waves of the sea.

"I'm afraid the room's rather close, Mr. Titmouse," hastily observed Gammon, perceiving, from Titmouse's sudden paleness and silence, but too evident symptoms that his powerful intellect was for a while paralysed. Gammon started to the window and opened it. Paler, however, and paler became Titmouse. Gammon's game was up much sooner than he had calculated on.

"Mrs. Brown! Mrs. Brown! order a coach instantly, and tell Tomkins"—that was the inn porter—"to get his son ready to go home with this gentleman—he's not very well." He was obeyed. It was, in truth, all up with Titmouse—at least for a while.

As soon as Gammon had thus got rid of his distinguished guest, he ordered the table to be cleared of the glasses, and tea to be ready within half an hour. He then walked out to enjoy the cool evening; on returning, sat pleasantly sipping his tea, now and then dipping into the edifying columns of the *Sunday Flash*, but oftener ruminating upon his recent conversation with Titmouse, and speculating upon certain possible results to himself personally; and a little after eleven o'clock, that good man, at peace with all the world—calm and serene—retired to repose. He had that night rather a singular dream; it was of a snake encircling a monkey, as if in gentle and playful embrace. Suddenly tightening its folds a crackling sound was heard; the writhing coils were then slowly unwound—and, with a shudder, he beheld the monster licking over the motionless figure, till it was covered with a viscid slime. Then the serpent began to devour its prey; and, when gorged and helpless, behold, it was immediately fallen upon by two other snakes. To his disturbed fancy, there was a dim resemblance between their heads and those of Quirk and Snap—they all three became intertwined together—and writhed and struggled till they fell over the edge of a dark and frightful precipice—he woke—thank God!—it was only a dream.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN, after his return from Mr. Gammon's chambers, at Thavies' Inn, Titmouse woke at an early hour in the morning, he was labouring under the ordinary effects of unaccustomed inebriety. His mouth and lips were parched; there was a weight pressing on his aching eyes, and upon his throbbing head. His pillow seemed undulating beneath him, and everything swimming around him: but when, to crown the whole, he was roused from a momentary nap by the insupportable—the loathed importunities of Mrs. Squalop, that he would just sit up and partake of three thick rounds of hot buttered toast, and a great

basin of smoking tea, which would do him *so* much good, and settle his stomach—at all events, if he'd only have a thimbleful of gin in it—poor Titmouse was fairly overcome. He lay in bed all that day, during which he underwent very severe sufferings; and it was not till towards night that he began to have anything like a distinct recollection of the evening he had spent with Mr. Gammon; who, by the way, had sent one of his clerks, during the afternoon, to inquire after him. He did not get out of bed on the Tuesday till past twelve o'clock, when, in a very rickety condition, he made his appearance at the shop of Messrs. Tag-rag and Co.; on approaching which he felt a sudden faintness, arising from mingled apprehension and disgust.

"What are you doing here, sir?—You're no longer in my employment, sir," exclaimed Tag-rag, attempting to speak calmly, as he hurried down the shop, white with rage, to meet Titmouse, and planted himself right in the way of his languid and pallid shopman. "Sir!" faintly exclaimed Titmouse, with his hat in his hand. "Very much obliged, sir—very! by the offer of your valuable services," said Tag-rag. "But—*that's* the way out again, sir—that!—there!—good morning, sir—good morning, sir!—that's the way out"—and he egged on Titmouse, till he had got him fairly into the street—with infinite difficulty restraining himself from giving him a parting kick. Titmouse stood for a moment before the door, trembling and aghast, looking in a bewildered manner at the shop: but Tag-rag again making his appearance, Titmouse slowly walked away and returned to his lodgings. Oh that Mr. Gammon had witnessed the scene—thought he—and so have been satisfied that it had been Tag-rag who had put an end to his service, not he himself who had quitted it!

The next day, about the same hour, Mr. Gammon made his appearance at the establishment from which Titmouse had been expelled so summarily, and inquired for Mr. Tag-rag, who presently presented himself—and recognising Mr. Gammon, who naturally reminded him of Titmouse, changed colour a little.

"What did you please to want, sir?" inquired Mr. Tag-rag, with a would-be resolute air, twirling round his watch-key with some energy.

"Only a few minutes' conversation, sir, if you please," said Mr. Gammon, with such a significant manner as a little disturbed Mr. Tag-rag; who, with an ill-supported sneer, bowed very low, and led the way to his own little room. Having closed the door, he, with an exceedingly civil air, begged Mr. Gammon to be seated; and then occupied the chair opposite to him, and awaited the issue with an ill-disguised anxiety.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Tag-rag," commenced Gammon, with his usual elegant and feeling manner, "that any misunderstanding should have arisen between you and Mr. Titmouse." "You're a lawyer, sir, I suppose?" Mr. Gammon bowed. "Then you must know, sir, that there are always two sides to a quarrel."

"Yes—you are right, Mr. Tag-rag; and, having already heard Mr. Titmouse's version, may I be favoured with *your* account of your reasons for dismissing him? For he tells us that yesterday you dismissed him suddenly from your employment, without giving him any warn —"

"So I did, sir; and what of that?" inquired Tag-rag, tossing his head with an air of defiance. "Things are come to a pretty pass indeed, when a man can't dismiss a drunken, idle, impudent, impertinent—abusive vagabond—"

"Do you seriously charge him with being such a character, and can you *prove* your charges, Mr. Tag-rag?" inquired Gammon, gravely. "Prove 'em! yes, sir, a hundred times over; so will all my young men!" "And in a court of justice, Mr. Tag-rag?" "Oh! he is going to *law*, is he? That's why you're come here—ah, ha!—when you can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, you may get your bill out of Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse!—ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tag-rag, hoping thereby to conceal how much he was really startled.

"Well—that's *our* look-out, Mr. Tag-rag : to Mr. Titmouse, his character is as valuable as Mr. Tag-rag's is to him. In short, he has placed himself in our hands, and we are resolved to go on with the case, if it costs us a hundred pounds—we are indeed, Mr. Tag-rag." "Why—he's not a penny in the world to go to law with!" exclaimed Tag-rag, with an air of mingled wonder, scorn, and alarm. "But you forget, Mr. Tag-rag, that if Mr. Titmouse's account should turn out to be correct, it will be *your* pocket that must pay all the expenses, amounting probably to twenty times the sum which the law may award to Mr. Titmouse."

"*Law*, sir!—It's not justice!—I hate law.—Give me common sense and common honesty!" "Both of them would condemn your conduct Mr. Tag-rag; for I have heard a full account of what Mr. Titmouse has suffered at your hands—of the cause of your sudden warning to him, and your still more sudden dismissal of yesterday. Oh, Mr. Tag-rag! upon my honour, it won't do—not for a moment—and should you go on rely upon what I tell you, that it will cost you dear." "And suppose, sir," said Tag-rag, in a would-be contemptuous tone—"I should have witnesses to prove all I've said—which of us will look funny then, sir?" "Which, indeed! However, since that is your good humour, I can only assure you that Mr. Titmouse defies you to prove any misconduct on his part. We have taken up his cause, and, as you may perhaps find, we shall not easily let it drop."

"I mean no offence, sir," said Tag-rag, in a mitigated tone; "but I must say, that ever since *you* first came here, Titmouse has been quite another person. He seems not to know who I am, nor to care either—and he's perfectly unbearable." "My dear sir, what has he *said* or *done*?—that, you know, is what you must be prepared to prove." "Well, sir! and which of us is likely to be best off for witnesses?—Think of that, sir—I've eighteen young men—" "We shall chance that, sir," replied Gammon, shrugging his shoulders: "but again, I ask, what did you dismiss him for? and I request a plain, straightforward answer." "What did I dismiss him for?—Haven't I eyes and ears?—First and foremost, he's the most odious-mannered fellow I ever came near—and—he hadn't a shirt to his back when I first took him—the ungrateful wretch!—Sir, it's not against the law, I suppose, to *hate* a man;—and, if it isn't, how I hate Titmouse!"

"Mr. Tag-rag"—said Gammon, lowering his voice, and looking very earnestly at his companion—"can I say a word to you in confidence—the strictest confidence?" "What's it about, sir?" inquired Tag-rag, with an apprehensive air. "I dare say you may have felt, perhaps, rather surprised at the interest which I—in fact our office, the office of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, in Saffron Hill—appear to have taken in Mr. Titmouse." "Why, sir, it's *your* look-out to see how you're to be paid for what you're doing—and I dare say lawyers generally keep a pretty sharp look-out in that direction."

"Gammon smiled, and continued—"it may, perhaps, a little surprise you, Mr. Tag-rag, to hear that your present (ought I to say, your *late*?) shopman, Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse, is at this moment probably the very luckiest man in this kingdom."

"Why—you don't mean to say he's drawn a prize in the lottery?"—exclaimed Tag-rag, pricking up his ears.

"Pho! my dear sir, *that* is a mere trifle compared with the good fortune that has befallen him. I solemnly assure you that I believe he will turn out to be the undoubted owner of an estate worth at least ten thousand a-year, besides a vast accumulation of ready money!"

"Ten thousand a-year, sir!—My Titmouse!—Tittlebat Titmouse!—Ten thousand a-year!" faltered Tag-rag, after a pause, having gone as pale as death. "I have as little doubt of the fact, as I have that you yesterday turned

him out of doors, Mr. Tag-rag!" "But—who could have dreamt it? How was—*really*, Mr. Gammon!—how *was* I to know it?" "That's the fact, however," said Gammon, shrugging his shoulders. Tag-rag wriggled about in his chair, put his hands in and out of his pockets, scratched his head, and continued staring open-mouthed at the bearer of such astounding intelligence. "Perhaps, however, all this is meant as a joke, sir,"—said he—"And if so—it's—it's—a very——"

"It's one of his solicitors who were fortunate enough to make the discovery, that tells you. I repeat what I have already told you, Mr. Tag-rag, that an estate of ten thousand a-year is the very least——" "Why, that's two hundred thousand pounds, sir!"—exclaimed Tag-rag, with an awe-struck air. "At the very least——" "Lord, Mr. Gammon!—Excuse me, sir, but how *did* you find it out?" "Mere accident—a mere accidental discovery, sir, in the course of other professional inquiries!" "And does Mr. Titmouse know it?" "Ever since the day after that on which I called on him here!" replied Gammon pointedly. "You don't say so!"—exclaimed Tag-rag, and then continued silent for nearly half a minute, evidently amazed beyond all power of expression. "Well,"—at length he observed—"I *will* say this—he's the most amiable young gentleman—the *very amiablest* young gentleman I—ever—came near. I always thought there was something uncommon superior-like in his looks."

"Yes—I think he *is* of rather an amiable turn," observed Gammon, with an expressive smile—"and so intelligent——"

"Intelligent! Mr. Gammon! you should only have known him as I have known him!—Well, to be sure!—Lord! His only fault was, that he was above his business; but when one comes to think of it, how could it be otherwise? From the time I first clapped eyes on him—I—I—knew he was—a superior article—quite superior—you know what I mean, sir?—He couldn't help it, of course!—to be sure—he never was much liked by the other young men; but that was jealousy!—all jealousy; I saw that all the while." Here he looked at the door and added in a very low tone, "Many sleepless nights has his bad treatment of Mr. Titmouse cost me!—Even I, now and then, used to look and speak sharply to him—just to keep him, as it were, down to the mark of the others—he was so uncommon handsome and genteel in his manner, sir. Hang me, if I didn't tell Mrs. Tag-rag the very first day he came to me, that he was a gentleman born—or ought to have been one."

Now, do you suppose, acute reader, that Mr. Tag-rag was insincere in all this? By no means. He spoke the real dictates of his heart, unaware of the sudden change which had taken place in his feelings. It certainly has an ugly look of improbability—but it was *the nature of the beast*; his eye suddenly caught a glimpse of the golden calf, and he instinctively fell down and worshipped it. "Well—at all events," said Mr. Gammon, scarcely able to keep a serious expression on his face—"though he's not lived much like a gentleman hitherto, yet he will live for the future like a *very great gentleman*—and spend his money like one, too."

"I—I—dare say—he will!—I wonder how he *will* get through a quarter of it! what do *you* think he'll do, sir?" "Heaven only knows—he may very shortly do just what he likes! Go into the House of Commons, or——"

"Lord, sir!—I feel as if I shouldn't be quite right again for the rest of the day!—I own to you, sir, that all yesterday and to day I've been on the point of going to Mr. Titmouse's lodgings to apologize for—for——Good gracious me!—one can't take it all in at once—Ten thousand a-year!—Many a lord hasn't got more—some not as much, I'll be bound!—Dear me, what will he do!—Well, one thing I'm *sure* of—he'll never have a truer friend than plain Thomas Tag-rag, though I've not always been a-flattering him—I respected him too much!—The many little things I've borne with in Titmouse, that in any one else I'd have—But why didn't he tell me, sir? We should have understood

one another in a moment."—Here he paused abruptly; for his breath seemed suddenly taken away, as he reviewed the series of indignities which he had latterly inflicted on Titmouse—the kind of life which that amiable young gentleman had led in his establishment.

Never had the keen Gammon enjoyed anything more exquisitely than the scene which I have been describing. To a man of his practical capacity in the affairs of life, and knowledge of human nature, nothing could appear more ludicrously contemptible than the conduct of poor Tag-rag. How differently are the minds of men constituted! How Gammon despised Tag-rag!

"Now, may I take it for granted, Mr. Tag-rag that we understand each other?" inquired Gammon. "Yes sir," replied Tag-rag meekly. "But do you think Mr. Titmouse will ever forgive or forget the little misunderstanding we've lately had? If I could but explain to him how I have been acting a part towards him—all for his good!" "You may have opportunities for doing so, if you are really so disposed, Mr. Tag-rag; for I have something seriously to propose to you. Circumstances render it desirable that for some little time this important affair should be kept as quiet as possible; and it is Mr. Titmouse's wish and ours—as his confidential professional advisers—that for some few months he should continue in your establishment, and apparently in your service as before."

"In my service!—in my service!" interrupted Tag-rag, opening his eyes to their utmost. "I sha'n't know how to behave in my own premises! Have a man with ten thousand a-year behind my counter, sir? I might as well have the Lord Mayor! Sir, it can't—it can't be. Now, if Mr. Titmouse chose to become a *partner* in the house—ay, there might be something in that—he needn't have any trouble—be only a sleeping partner." Tag-rag warmed with the thought. "Really, sir, that wouldn't be so much amiss—would it?" Gammon assured him that it was out of the question; and gave him some of the reasons for the proposal which he (Mr. Gammon) had been making. While Gammon fancied that Tag-rag was paying profound attention to what he was saying, Tag-rag's thoughts had shot far a-head. He had an only child—a daughter, about twenty years old—Miss Tabitha Tag-rag; and the delightful possibility of her by-and-by becoming Mrs. Titmouse, put her amiable parent into a perspiration. Into the proposal just made by Mr. Gammon he fell with great eagerness, which he attempted to conceal—for what innumerable opportunities would it not afford him for bringing about the desire of his heart—for throwing the lovely young couple into each other's way,—endearing them to each other! If Mr. Titmouse did not dine with him, Mrs., and Miss Tag-rag, at *Satin Lodge, Clapham*, on the very next Sunday, it should, Tag-rag resolved, be owing to no fault of *his*.—Mr. Gammon having again enjoined Mr. Tag-rag to absolute secrecy, took his departure. Mr. Tag-rag, in his excitement, thrust out his hand, and grasped that of Gammon, which was extended towards him somewhat coldly and reluctantly. Tag-rag attended him with extreme obsequiousness to the door; and on his departure walked back rapidly to his own room, and sat down for nearly half-an-hour in deep thought. Abruptly rising at length, he clapped his hat on his head, and saying that he should soon be back, hurried out to call upon his future son-in-law, full of affectionate anxiety concerning his health—and vowing within himself, that henceforth it should be the study of his life to make his daughter and Titmouse happy! There could be no doubt of the reality of the event just communicated to him by Mr. Gammon; for he was one of a well-known firm of solicitors; he had had an interview on "important business" with Titmouse a fortnight ago, and that could have been nothing but the prodigious event just communicated to himself. Such things had happened to others—why not to Tittlebat Titmouse? In short, Tag-rag had no doubt on the matter.

He found Titmouse not at home ; so he left a most particularly civil message, half a dozen times repeated, with Mrs. Squallop (to whom also he was especially civil), to the effect that he, Mr. Tag-rag, should be only too happy to see Mr. Titmouse at No. 375, Oxford Street, whenever it might suit his convenience ; that he had something very particular to say to him about the unpleasant and unaccountable occurrence of yesterday ; that he was most deeply concerned to hear of Mr. Titmouse's indisposition, and anxious to learn from himself that he had recovered, etc., etc., etc. ;—all which, together with one or two other little matters, which Mrs. Squallop could not help putting together, satisfied that shrewd lady that “something was in the wind about Mr. Titmouse ;” and made her reflect rather anxiously on one or two violent scenes she had had with him, and which *she* was now ready entirely to forget and forgive. Having thus done all that at present was in his power to forward the thing, the anxious and excited Tag-rag returned to his shop ; on entering which, one Lutestring, his principal young man, eagerly apprised him of a claim which he had, as he imagined, only the moment before established to the thanks of Mr. Tag-rag, by having “bundled off, neck and crop, that hodious Titmouse,” who, about five minutes before, had, it seemed, had the “impudence” to present himself at the shop-door, and walk in as if nothing had happened ! [Titmouse had so presented himself, in consequence of a call from Mr. Gammon immediately after his interview with Tag-rag.]

“You—ordered—Mr. Titmouse—off ! !” exclaimed Tag-rag, starting back aghast, and stopping his voluble and officious assistant. “Of course, sir—after what happened yester—” “Who authorized you, Mr. Lutestring ?” inquired Tag-rag, striving to choke down the rage that was rising within him. “Why, sir, I *really* supposed that—” “You supposed ! You’re a meddling, impertinent, disgusting—”

Suddenly his face was overspread with smiles as three or four elegantly-dressed customers, entered, whom he received with profuse obeisances. But when their backs were turned, he directed a lightning look towards Lutestring, and retreated once more to his room, to meditate on the agitating events of the last hour. The extraordinary alteration in Mr. Tag-rag's behaviour was attributed by his shopman to his having been frightened out of his wits by the threats of Titmouse's lawyer—for such it was clear the stranger was ; and more than one of them stored it up in their minds as a useful precedent against some future occasion.

Twice afterwards during the day did Tag-rag call at Titmouse's lodgings—but in vain ; and on returning the third time felt not a little disquieted. He determined, however, to call the first thing on the ensuing morning ; if he should then fail of seeing Mr. Titmouse, he was resolved to go to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—and besides, address a very affectionate letter to Mr. Titmouse. How totally changed had become all his feelings towards that gentleman within the last few hours ! The more Tag-rag reflected on Titmouse's conduct, the more he saw in it to approve of. How steady and regular had he been in his habits ! how civil and obliging ! how patient of rebuke ! how pleasing in his manners to the customers ! Surely, surely, thought Tag-rag, Titmouse can't have been four long years in my employ without getting a—sort of a—feeling—of attachment to me—he'd have left long ago if he hadn't ! It was true there had now and then been tiffs between them ; but who could agree always ? Even Mrs. Tag-rag and he, when they were courting, often fell out with one another. Tag-rag was now ready to forget and forgive all—he had never meant any harm to Titmouse. He believed that poor Tittlebat was an orphan, poor soul ! alone in the wide world—*now* he would become the prey of designing strangers. Tag-rag did not like the appearance of Gammon. No doubt that person would try and ingratiate himself as much as possible with

Titmouse! Then Titmouse was remarkably good-looking. "I wonder what Tabby will think of him when she sees him!" How anxious Tittlebat must be to see her—*his* daughter! How could Tag-rag make Tittlebat's stay at his premises (for he could not bring himself to believe that on the morrow he could not set all right, and disavow the impudent conduct of Lutestring) agreeable and delightful? He would discharge the first of his young men that did not show Titmouse proper respect. What low lodgings poor Tittlebat lived in! Why could he not take up his quarters at Satin Lodge? They always had a nice spare bed-room. Ah! *that* would be a stroke! How Tabby could endear herself to him! What a number of things Mrs. Tag-rag could do to make him comfortable.

About seven o'clock Tag-rag quitted his premises in Oxford Street, for his country house; and, occupied with these and similar delightful and anxious thoughts and speculations, hurried along Oxford Street on his way to the Clapham stage, without thinking of his umbrella, though it rained fast. When he had taken his place on the coach-box, beside old Crack (as he had done almost every night for years), he was so unusually silent that Crack naturally thought that his best passenger was going to become bankrupt, or compound with his creditors, or something of that sort. Mr. Tag-rag could hardly keep his temper at the slow pace old Crack was driving at—just when Tag-rag could have wished to gallop the whole way. Never had he descended with so much briskness, as when the coach at length drew up before the little green gate, which opened on the nice little gravel walk, which led up to the little green wooden porch, which sheltered the slim door which admitted you into Satin Lodge. As Tag-rag stood for a moment wiping his wet shoes upon the mat, he could not help observing, for the first time, by the inward light of ten thousand a-year, how uncommon narrow the passage was; and thinking that Satin Lodge would never do, when he should be the father-in-law of a man worth ten thousand a-year, he could easily let that house and take a larger one. As he hung his hat upon the peg, the mischievous insolence of Lutestring occurred to him; and he deposited such a prodigious, but half-suppressed execration upon that gentleman's name, as must have sunk a far more buoyant sinner many fathoms deeper than usual into a certain hot and deep place that shall be nameless.

Mrs. and Miss Tag-rag were sitting in the front parlour, intending to take tea as soon as Mr. Tag-rag should have arrived. It was not a large room, but furnished prettily, according to the taste of the owners. There was only one window, and it had a flaunting white summer curtain. The walls were ornamented with three pictures, in slight gilt frames, being portraits of Mr., Mrs., and Miss Tag-rag; and I do not wish to say more of these pictures, than that in each of them the *dress* was done with singular exactment and fidelity—the faces seeming to have been painted in, in order to set off and complete the picture of the dress. The skinny little Miss Tag-rag sat at the worn-out, jingling pianoforte, playing—oh, horrid and doleful sound!—*The Battle of Prague*. Mrs. Tag-rag, a fat, showily-dressed woman of about fifty, her cap having a prodigious number of artificial flowers in it, sat reading a profitable volume, entitled "*Groans from the Bottomless Pit to Awaken Sleeping Sinners*," by the Rev. *Dismal Horror*—a very rousing young dissenting preacher lately come into that neighbourhood, and who had almost frightened into fits half the women and children, and one or two old men, of his congregation; giving out, amongst several similarly cheering intimations, that they must all necessarily be damned unless they immediately set about making themselves as miserable as possible in this world. Only the Sunday before, he had pointed out, with awful force and distinctness, how cards and novels were the devil's traps to catch souls; and balls and theatres short and easy cuts to—~~them~~. He had

proved to his trembling female hearers, in effect, that there was only one way to heaven—through his chapel; that the only safe mode of spending their time on earth was reading such blessed works as that which he had just published, and going to prayer-meetings almost daily. But when, a Sunday or two before, he preached a funeral sermon, to “improve the death”—such being his impressive phrase—of a Miss Snooks (who had kept a circulating library in the neighbourhood); and, who having been to the theatre on the Thursday night, was taken ill of a bowel attack on the Friday, and was a “lifeless corpse when the next Sabbath dawned,”—you might have heard a beetle sneeze within any of the walls, all over the crowded chapel. Two-thirds of the women present, struck with the awful judgment upon the deceased Miss Snooks, made solemn vows never again to enter the accursed walls of a theatre; many determined no longer to subscribe to the circulating library, ruining their precious souls with light and amusing reading; and almost all resolved forthwith to become active members of a sort of religious tract society, which Mr. Horror had just established in the neighbourhood, for the purpose of giving the sick and starving poor *spiritual* food, in the shape of tracts (chiefly written by himself), which might “wean their affections away from this vain world,” and “fix them on better things,” rejoicing, in the meanwhile, in the bitter pangs of destitution. All this sort of thing Mr. Horror possibly imagined to be advancing the cause of real religion! In short he had created a sort of spiritual fever about the place, which was then just at its height in worthy Mrs. Tag-rag.

“Well, Dolly, how are you to-night?” inquired Tag-rag, with unusual briskness, on entering the room. “Tolerable, thank you, Tag,” replied Mrs. Tag-rag mournfully, with a sigh, closing the cheerful volume she had been perusing—it having been recommended the preceding Sunday from the pulpit by its pious and gifted author, Mr. Horror, to be read and prayed over every day by every member of his congregation. “And how are *you*, Tabby?” said Tag-rag, addressing his daughter. “Come and kiss me, you little slut, come!” “No, I sha’n’t pa? Do let me go on with my practising”—and twang! twang! went those infernal keys. “D’ye hear, Tab? Come and kiss me, you little minx —” “Really, pa, how provoking—just as I am in the middle of the *Cries of the Wounded*? I sha’n’t—that’s flat.”

The doating parent could not, however, be denied; so he stepped to the piano, put his arms around his dutiful daughter’s neck, kissed her fondly, and then stood for a moment behind her, admiring her brilliant execution of *The Trumpet of Victory*. Having changed his coat, and put on an old pair of shoes, Tag-rag was comfortable for the evening.

“Tabby plays wonderful well, Dolly, don’t she?” said Tag-rag, as the tea-things were being brought in, by way of beginning a conversation, while he drew his chair nearer to his wife. “Ah! I’d a deal rather see her reading something serious—for life is short, Tag, and eternity’s long.” “Botheration!—Stuff!—Tut!” “You may find it out one day, my dear, when it’s too late—” “I’ll tell you what, Dolly,” said Tag-rag angrily, “you’re coming a great deal too much of that sort of thing—my house is getting like a Methodist meeting-house. I can’t bear it,—I can’t! What the deuce is come to you all in these parts, lately?” Mr. Tag-rag had been induced, some three years before, to quit the Church of England and take up with Mr. Dismal Horror; but his zeal by no means kept pace with that of his wife.

“Ah, Tag-rag,” replied his wife, with a sigh, “I can only pray for you—I can do no more—” “Oh!” exclaimed Tag-rag, with an air of desperate disgust, thrusting his hands in his pockets, and stretching his legs to their utmost extent under the table. “I’ll tell you what, Mrs. T.,” he added, after a while, “too much of one thing is good for nothing; you may choke a dog with pudding;—I sha’n’t renew my sittings at Mr. Horror’s.” “Oh, dear, dear pa,

do! That's a love of a pa!" interposed Miss Tag-rag, twirling round on her music-stool. "All Clapham's running after him—he's quite the rage! There's the Dugginses, the Pips, the Jones, the Maggots—and, really, Mr. Horror does preach such dreadful things, it's quite delightful to look round and see all the people with their eyes and mouths wide open—and ours is such a good pew for seeing—and Mr. Horror is such a bee—yeautiful preacher,—isn't he, ma?" "Yes, love he is—but I wish I could see you profit by him, and preparing for death——" "Why, ma, how *can* you go on in that ridiculous way? You know I'm not twenty yet!" "Well, well! poor Tabby!" here Mrs. Tag-rag's voice faltered—"a day will come when——"

"Play me the *Devil among the Tailors*, or *Copenhagen Waltz*, or something of that sort, Tabby," said her father furiously, "or I shall be sick!—I can't bear it! Curse Mr. Hor——" "Well!—Oh, my!—I never!—Mr. Tag-rag!" exclaimed his astounded wife. "Play away, Tab, or I'll go and sit in the kitchen! They're cheerful *there*! The next time I come across Mr. Horror, if I don't give him a bit of my mind"—here he paused, and slapped his hand with much energy upon the table. Mrs. Tag-rag wiped her eyes, sighed, and resumed her book. Miss Tag-rag began to make tea, her papa gradually forgetting his rage, as he fixed his dull grey eyes fondly on the pert, skinny countenance of his daughter.

"By the way, Tag," exclaimed Mrs. Tag-rag suddenly, but in the same mournful tone, addressing her husband, "you haven't of course forgot the flowers for my new bonnet?" "Never once thought of it," replied Tag-rag, doggedly. "You haven't! Good gracious! what am I to go to chapel in next Sunday!" she exclaimed, with sudden alarm, closing her book, "and our seat in the very front of the gallery!—bless me! I shall have a hundred eyes on me!"

"Now that you're coming down a bit, and dropped out of the clouds, Dolly," said her husband, much relieved, "I'll tell you a bit of news that will, I fancy, rather——" "Come! what is it, Tag?" eagerly inquired his wife. "What should you say of a chance of a certain somebody" (here he looked unutterable things at his daughter) "that shall be nameless, becoming mistress of ten thousand a-year?" "Why?"—Mrs. Tag-rag changed colour—"has any one fallen in love with Tab?" "What should you say, Mrs. T., of our Tab marrying a man with ten thousand a-year? There's for you! Isn't *that* better than all your——" "Oh, Tag, don't say that; but"—here she hastily turned down the leaf of *Groans from the Bottomless Pit*, and tossed that inestimable work upon the sofa—"do tell me, lovy! what *are* you talking about?" "What indeed, Dolly!—I'm going to have him here to dinner next Sunday."

Miss Tag-rag having been listening with breathless eagerness to this little colloquy between her prudent and amiable parents, unconscious of what she was about, poured all the tea into the sugar-basin, instead of her papa's tea-cup.

"Have *who*, dear Tag?" inquired Mrs. Tag-rag impatiently. "Who? why whom but my Tittlebat Titmouse!! You've seen him, and heard me speak of him often, you know——" "What!—*that* odious, nasty——" "Hush, hush!" involuntarily exclaimed Tag-rag, with an apprehensive air—"That's all past and gone—I was always a little too hard on him. Well, at all events, he's turned up all of a sudden master of ten thousand a-year. He has, indeed—may this piece of toast choke me if he hasn't!"

Mrs. Tag-rag and her daughter sat in speechless wonder. "Where did he see Tab, Taggy?" inquired at length Mrs. Tag-rag. "Oh—I—I—why—you see—I don't exactly think *that* signifies so much—He *will* see her, you know, next Sunday." "So then he's positively coming?" inquired Mrs. Tag-rag with a fluttered air. "Y—e—s—I've no doubt."—(I'll discharge Lutestring to-morrow, thought Tag-rag with a sharp inward spasm.)

"But aren't we counting our chickens, Taggy, before they're hatched? If Titmouse is all of a sudden become such a catch, he'll be snapped up in a minute, you know, of course—" "Why, you see, Dolly—we're first in the market, I'm sure of that—his attorney tells me he's to be kept quite snug and quiet under my care for months, and see no one—" "My gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Tag-rag, holding up both her hands—"if *that* don't look like a special interposition of Providence, now—" "So *I* thought, Tabby, while Mr. Gammon was telling me!" replied her husband. "Ah, Tag, there are many of 'em, if we were only to be on the look-out for them!" "I see it all! It's designed by Providence to get them soon together! When once Mr. Titmouse gets sight of Tabby, and gets into her company—eh! Tab, lovy! *you'll* do the rest, hem!" "La, pa! how you go on!" simpered Miss Tag-rag. "You must do your part, Tab," said her father—"we'll do ours. He'll bite, you may depend on it, if you manage well!" "What sort of a looking young man is he, dear pa?" inquired Miss Tag-rag blushing, and her heart fluttering very fast. "Oh, you *must* have seen him, sweetest—" "How should I ever notice any one of the lots of young men at the shop, pa?—I don't at all know him." "Well he's the handsomest, most genteel-looking young fellow I ever came across; he's long been an ornament to my establishment, for his good looks and civil and obliging manners—quite a treasure! You should have seen how he *took* with ladies of rank always!—"

"Dear me," interrupted Mrs. Tag-rag, anxiously addressing her daughter, "I hope, Tabby, that Miss Nix will send home your lilac-coloured frock by next Sunday!" "If she *don't*, ma, I'll take care she never makes anything more for me, that's poz?" replied Miss Tag-rag earnestly.

"We'll call there to-morrow, love, and hurry her on," said her mother; and from that moment until the amiable and interesting trio retired to rest, nothing was talked of but the charming Titmouse, and the good fortune he so richly deserved, and how long the courtship was likely to last. Mrs. Tag-rag, who, for the last month or so, had always remained on her knees before getting into bed for at least ten minutes, on this eventful evening compressed her prayers, I regret to say, into one minute and a half's time (as for Tag-rag, a hardened heathen, for all he had taken to hearing Mr. Horror, he always tumbled prayerless into bed, the moment he was undressed); while, for once in a way, Miss Tag-rag, having taken only half an hour to put her hair into papers, popped into bed directly she had blown the candle out without saying *any* prayers—or even thinking of finishing the novel which lay under her pillow, and which she had got on the sly from the circulating library of the late Miss Snooks. For several hours she lay in a delicious reverie, imagining herself become Mrs. Tittlebat Titmouse, riding about Clapham in a handsome carriage, going to the play every night; and what would the three Miss Knippes say when they heard of it—they'd burst. And such a handsome man, too! She sunk, at length, into unconsciousness, amidst a soft confusion of glistening white satin—favourites—bridesmaids—Mrs. Tittlebat Tit—Tit—Tit—Tit—mouse.

Titmouse, about half-past nine o'clock on the ensuing morning, was sitting in his little room in a somewhat troubled humour, musing on many things, and little imagining the intense interest he had excited in the feelings of the amiable occupants of Satin Lodge, when a knock at his door startled him out of his reverie. Guess his amazement to see, on opening it, Mr. Tag-rag!

"Your most obedient, sir," commenced that gentleman, in a subdued and obsequious manner, plucking off his hat the instant that he saw Titmouse. "I hope you're better, sir!—Been very uneasy, sir, about you." "Please to walk in, sir," replied Titmouse, not a little flustered—"I'm better, sir, thank you." "Happy to hear it, sir!—But am also come to offer humble apologies for the rudeness of that upstart that was so rude to you yesterday, at my premises—"

know whom I mean, eh?—Lutestring—I shall get rid of him, I do think——” “Thank you, sir—But—but—when I was in your employ——” “*Was in my employ!*” interrupted Tag-rag with a sigh, gazing earnestly at him—“It’s no use trying to hide it any longer! I’ve all along seen you was a world too good for—in fact, quite above your situation in my poor shop! I *may* have been wrong, Mr. Titmouse,” he continued diffidently, as he placed himself on what seemed the only chair in the room (Titmouse sitting on a common wooden stool)—“but I did it for the best—eh?—don’t you understand me, Mr. Titmouse?” Titmouse continued looking on the floor incredulously, sheepishly, and somewhat sullenly.

“Very much obliged, sir—but must say you’ve rather a funny way of showing it, sir. Look at the sort of life you’ve led me for this——” “Ah! knew you’d say so! But I can lay my hand on my heart, Mr. Titmouse, and declare to God—I can, indeed, Mr. Titmouse——” Titmouse preserved a very embarrassing silence.—“*See*, I’m out of your good books—But—won’t you forget and forgive, Mr. Titmouse? I *meant* well. Nay, I humbly beg forgiveness for everything you’ve not liked in me. Can I say more? Come, Mr. Titmouse, you’ve a noble nature, and I ask forgiveness!” cried Tag-rag softly and earnestly: you would have thought that his life depended on his success in what he was doing!

“You—you ought to do it before the whole shop, if you’re in earnest,” replied Titmouse, a little relenting—“for they’ve all seen your goings on.”

“Them!—the brutes!—the vulgar fellows, eugh!—you and I, Mr. Titmouse, are a *leetle* above them! D’ye think we ought to mind what *servants* say?—Only you say the word, and I make a clean sweep of ’em all; you shall have the premises to yourself, Mr. Titmouse, within an hour after any of those chaps show you the least glimmer of disrespect.”

“Ah! I don’t know—you’ve used me most uncommon bad, ’pon my soul!—far worse than they have—you’ve nearly broke my heart, sir! You have!”

“Well, my woman-kind at home are right, after all! They told me all along that I was going the wrong way to work, when I said how I tried to keep your pride down, and prevent you from having your head turned by knowing your good looks! Over and over again, my little girl has said with tears in her dear eyes, ‘you’ll break his spirit, dear papa—if he *is* handsome, wasn’t it God that made him so?’” The little frostwork which Titmouse had thrown around his heart, began to melt like snow under sunbeams. “Ah, Mr. Titmouse, Mr. Titmouse! the women are always right, and *we’re* always wrong,” continued Tag-rag earnestly, perceiving his advantage. “Upon my soul, I could kick myself for my stupidity, and cruelty too!”

“Ah, I should think so! No one knows what I’ve suffered! And now that I’m—I suppose you’ve heard it all, sir?—what’s in the wind—and all that?”

“Yes, sir—Mr. Gammon (that most respectable gentleman) and I have had a long talk yesterday about you, in which he did certainly tell me everything—nothing like confidence. Mr. Titmouse, when gentleman meets gentleman, you know! Oh, Lord! the news is really delightful! delightful!” “*Isn’t it, sir?*” eagerly interrupted Titmouse, his eyes glistening with sudden rapture. “Ah! ten thous—I *must* shake hands with you, my dear Mr. Titmouse;” and then for the first time in their lives their hands touched, Tag-rag squeezing that of Titmouse with energetic cordiality; while he added, with a little emotion in his tone—“Thomas Tag-rag may be a plain-spoken and wrong-headed man, Mr. Titmouse—but he’s a warm heart, I assure you!”

“And did Mr. Gammon tell you *all*, sir?” eagerly interrupted Titmouse. “Everything—everything; quite confidential, I assure you, for he saw the interest I felt in you!” “And did he say about my—hem!—eh? my stopping a few weeks longer with you?” inquired Titmouse, chagrin overspreading his

features. "I think he did, indeed, Mr. Titmouse! He's quite bent on it, sir! And so would any true friend of yours be—because you see," here he dropped his voice, and looked very mysteriously at Titmouse—"in short, I quite agree with Mr. Gammon!" "Do you indeed, sir!" exclaimed Titmouse, with rather an uneasy look. "I do, i' faith! Why, they'd give thousands and thousands to get you out of the way—and what's money to them! But they must look very sharp that get at you in the premises of Thomas Tag-rag, I warrant 'em!—Talking of that, ah, ha!—it *will* be a funny thing to see *you*, Mr. Titmouse—Squire Titmouse—ah, ha, ha!" "You won't hardly expect me to go out with *goods*, I suppose, sir?" "Ha, ha, ha!—Ha, ha, ha!—Might as well ask me if I'd clean that beast Lutestring's shoes! No, no, my dear Mr. Titmouse, you and I have done with each other as master and servant; it's only as friends that we know each other now!—You may go and do whatever you like, and come and go when and where you like!—It's true it will make my other hands rather jealous, and get me into trouble; but what do I care? Suppose they *do* all give me warning for your sake? Let 'em go, say I!" He snapped his fingers with an air of defiance. "*Your* looks and manners would keep a shop full of customers—one Titmouse is worth a hundred of them."

"'Pon my soul, you speak most uncommon gentlemanlike, sir, certainly!" said Titmouse, with a little excitement—"and if you'd only *always*—but that's all past and gone; and I've no objections to say at once, that all the articles I may want in your line I'll have at your establishment, pay cash down, and ask for no discount. And I'll send all my friends, for, in course, sir, you know I shall have lots of them!"

"Don't forget your oldest, your truest, your humblest friend, Mr. Titmouse," said Tag-rag, with a cringing air. "That I won't!" replied Titmouse heatedly. [It flashed across his mind that a true and old friend would be only too happy to do him some such trifling service as to lend him a ten-pound note.] "Hem!—Now, *are* you such a friend, Mr. Tag-rag?" cried he sheepishly. "Am I?—Can you doubt me? Try me! See what I could not do for you? Friend, indeed?" and he looked quite fondly at Titmouse. "Well, I believe you, sir! And the fact is, a—a—a—you see, Mr. Tag-rag, though all this heap of money's *coming* to me, I'm precious low just *now*—" "Ye—e—e—s, Mr. Titmouse," quoth Tag-rag anxiously; his dull grey eye fixed on that of Titmouse steadfastly. "Well—if you've a mind to prove your words, Mr. Tag-rag, and don't mind advancing me a ten-pound note—"

"Hem!" involuntarily uttered Tag-rag, so suddenly and violently, that it made Titmouse almost start off his seat. Then Tag-rag's face flushed over, he twirled about his watch-key rapidly, and wriggled about in his chair with visible agitation.

"Oh, you aren't going to do it! If so, you'd better say it at once," quoth Titmouse, rather cavalierly. "Why—*was* ever anything so unfortunate?" stammered Tag-rag. "That cursed lot of French goods I bought only yesterday, to be paid for this very morning—and it will drain me of every penny!" "Ah—yes! True! Well, it don't much signify," said Titmouse carelessly, running his hand through his bushy hair. "In fact, I needn't have bothered an old friend at all, now I think of it—Mr. Gammon says he's my banker to any amount. I beg pardon, I'm sure—"

Tag-rag was in a horrid dilemma. He felt so flustered by the suddenness and seriousness of the thing, that he could not see his way plain in any direction.

"Let me see," at length he stammered; and pulling a ready-reckoner out of his pocket, he affected to be consulting it, as if to ascertain merely the state of his banker's account, but really desiring a few moment's time to collect his thoughts. 'Twas in vain, however; nothing occurred to him; he saw no way of escape; his old friend the devil deserted him for a moment—supplying him

with no ready lie to meet the exigency. He must, he feared, cash up! Well," said he—"it certainly *is* rather unfortunate just at this precise moment; but I'll step to the shop, and see how my ready-money matters stand. It sha'n't be a trifle, Mr. Titmouse, that shall stand between us. But—if I *should* be hard run—perhaps—eh? Would a five-pound note do?" "Why—a—a—certainly, if it wouldn't suit you to advance the ten—" "I dare say," interrupted Tag-rag, a trifle relieved, "I shall be able to accommodate you. Perhaps you'll step on to the shop presently, and then we can talk over matters!—By the way, did you ever see anything so odd? forgot the main thing; come and take your mutton with me at Clapham, next Sunday—my woman-kind will be quite delighted. Nay, 'tis *their* invitation—ha, ha!" "You're uncommon polite," replied Titmouse, colouring with pleasure. Here seemed the first pale primrose of the coming spring—an invitation to Satin Lodge! "The politeness—the favour—will be yours, Mr. Titmouse! I'm quite proud of your coming! We shall be quite alone; have you all to ourselves; only me, my wife, and daughter—an only child, Mr. Titmouse—*such* a child! She's really often said to me, 'I wonder'—but,—I won't make you vain, eh? May I call it a fixture?"

"'Pon my life, Mr. Tag-rag, you're monstrous uncommon polite. It's true, I was going to dine with Mr. Gammon—" "Oh! pho! (I mean no disrespect, mind!) he's only a bachelor—I've got ladies in the case, and all that—eh, Mr. Titmouse? and a *young* one!" "Well, thank you, sir. Since you're so pressing—" "That's it! An engagement, poz!—Satin Lodge—for Sunday next," said Tag-rag, rising and looking at his watch. "Time for me to be off. See you soon at the shop? Soon arrange that little matter of business, eh? You understand? Good-bye! good-bye!" and shaking Titmouse cordially by the hand, Tag-rag took his departure.

As he hurried on to his shop, he felt in a most painful perplexity about this loan of five pounds. It was truly like squeezing five drops of blood out of his heart. But what was to be done? Could he offend Titmouse? Where was he to stop, if he once began? Dare he ask for security? Suppose the whole affair should after all turn into smoke?

Now, consider the folly of Tag-rag. Here was he in all this terrible pucker about advancing *five pounds* on the strength of prospects and chances which he had deemed safe for adventuring *his daughter* upon—her, the only object upon earth (except money), that he regarded with anything like sincere affection. How was this? The splendour of the future possible good fortune of his daughter might, perhaps, have dazzled and confused his perceptions. Then, again, *that* was a *remote* contingent venture: but this sudden appeal to his pocket—the demand of an immediate outlay and venture—was an instant pressure, and he felt it severely. Immediate profit was everything to Tag-rag—'twas his life's blood! He was, in truth, a *tradesman to his heart's core*. Observe, discriminating reader, that there is all the difference in the world between a *tradesman* and a *merchant*; and, moreover, that it is not every *tradesman* that is a Tag-rag.

All these considerations combined to keep Tag-rag in a perfect fever of doubt and anxiety, which several hearty curses (I regret to say), failed in effectually relieving. By the time, however, that Titmouse had made his appearance at Mr. Tag-rag's shop, with a sufficiently sheepish air, and was beginning to run the gauntlet of grinning contempt from the choice youths on each side of the shop, Tag-rag had determined on the course he should pursue in the very embarrassing matter above referred to. To the amazement of all present, he bolted out of a little counting-house or side-room, hastened to meet Titmouse with outstretched hand and cordial speech, drew him into his little room, and shut the door. There Tag-rag informed his flurried young friend that he had

made arrangements (with a little inconvenience, which, however, between friends, signified nothing) for lending Titmouse five pounds.

"And, as life's uncertain, my dear Mr. Titmouse," said Tag-rag, as Titmouse, with ill-disguised ecstasy, put the five-pound note into his pocket—"even between the dearest friends—eh? Understand? It's not *you* I fear, nor you me, because we've confidence in each other. But if anything should happen, those we leave behind us"—Here he took out of his desk, an "I. O. U. £5," ready drawn up and dated—"a mere slip—a word or two—is satisfaction to both of us."

"Oh, yes, sir! yes, sir!—anything!" said Titmouse; and hastily taking the pen proffered him, signed his name; on which Tag-rag felt a little relieved. Lutestring was then summoned into the room, and thus (not a little to his disgust and astonishment) addressed by his imperious employer. "Mr. Lutestring, you will have the goodness to see that Mr. Titmouse is treated by every person in my establishment with the utmost possible respect. Whoever treats this gentleman with the slightest disrespect isn't any longer a servant of mine. D'ye hear me, Mr. Lutestring?" added Tag-rag sternly, observing a very significant glance of intense hatred which Lutestring directed towards Titmouse. "D'ye hear me, sir?"

"Oh, yes, sir! yes, sir! your orders shall be attended to," he replied, in as insolent a tone as he could venture upon, and leaving the room, with a half audible whistle of contempt, while a grin overspread his features, he had within five minutes filled the mind of every shopman in the establishment with feelings of mingled wonder, hatred, and fear towards Titmouse. What, thought they, could have happened? What was Mr. Tag-rag about? This was all of a piece with his rage at Lutestring the day before. "D—n Titmouse!" said or thought every one of them!

Titmouse, for the remainder of the day, felt, as may be imagined, but little at his ease; for—to say nothing of his insuperable repugnance to the discharge of any of his former duties; his uneasiness under the oppressive civilities of Mr. Tag-rag; and the evident disgust towards him entertained by his companions; many most important considerations arising out of recent and coming events—his altering circumstances—were momentarily forcing themselves upon his attention. The first of these was his *hair*; for Heaven seemed to have suddenly given him the long-coveted means of changing its detested hue; and the next was an *eyeglass*, without which, he had long felt his appearance and appointments to be painfully incomplete. Early in the afternoon, therefore, on the readily-admitted plea of important business, he obtained the permission of the obsequious Mr. Tag-rag to depart for the day; and instantly directed his steps to the well-known shop of a fashionable perfumer and perruquier, in Bond Street—well known to those, at least, who were in the habit of glancing at the enticing advertisements in the newspapers. Having watched through the window till the coast was clear (for he felt a natural delicacy in asking for a hair dye before people who could in an instant perceive his urgent occasion for it), he entered the shop, where a well-dressed gentleman was sitting behind the counter reading. He was handsome; and his elaborately curled hair was of a heavenly black (so at least Titmouse considered it) that was better than a thousand printed advertisements of the celebrated fluid which formed the chief commodity there vended. Titmouse, with a little hesitation, asked this gentleman what was the price of their article "for turning *light* hair black"—and was answered—"only seven and sixpence for the smaller-sized bottle." One was in a twinkling placed upon the counter, where it lay like a miniature mummy, swathed, as it were, in manifold advertisements. "You'll find the fullest directions within, and testimonials from the highest nobility to the wonderful efficacy of the '*Cyanochaitanthropopoion*.'"

"Sure it will do, sir?" inquired Titmouse anxiously. "Is *my* hair dark enough to your taste, sir?" said the gentleman, with a calm and bland manner—"because I owe it entirely to this invaluable specific." "Do you, indeed, sir?" inquired Titmouse: adding with a sigh, "but, between ourselves, look at mine!"—and, lifting off his hat for a moment, he exhibited a great crop of bushy, carrotty hair. "Whew! rather ugly that, sir!"—exclaimed the gentleman, looking very serious—"What a curse it is to be born with such hair, isn't it?" "'Pon my life I think so, sir!" answered Titmouse mournfully; "and do you really say, sir, that this what's-its-name turned yours of that beautiful black?"

"Think? 'Pon my honour, sir,—certain; no mistake, I assure you! I was fretting myself into my grave about the colour of my hair! Why, sir, there was a nobleman in here (I don't like to mention names) the other day, with a head that seemed as if it had been dipped into water, and then powdered with brick dust; but—I assure you, the Cyanochaitanthropopoion was too much for it—it turned black in a very short time. You should have seen his lordship's ecstasy —[the speaker saw that Titmouse would swallow anything; so he went on with a confident air]—and in a month's time he had married a beautiful woman whom he had loved from a child, but who had vowed she could never bring herself to marry a man with such a head of hair."

"How long does it take to do all this, sir?" interrupted Titmouse eagerly, with a beating heart. "Sometimes two—sometimes three days. In four days' time, I'll answer for it, your most intimate friend would not know you. My wife did not know me for a long while, and wouldn't let me salute her—ha, ha!" Here another customer entered; and Titmouse, laying down the five-pound note he had squeezed out of Tag-rag, put the wonder-working phial into his pocket, and on receiving his change, departed, bursting with eagerness to try the effects of the Cyanochaitanthropopoion. Within half-an-hour's time he might have been seen driving a hard bargain with a pawnbroker, for a massive-looking eye-glass, which, as it hung suspended in the window, he had for months cast a longing eye upon; and he eventually purchased it (his eye-sight, I need hardly say, was perfect) for only fifteen shillings. After taking a hearty dinner in a little dusky eating-house in Rupert Street, frequented by fashionable-looking foreigners, with splendid heads of curling hair and moustaches, he hastened home, eager to commence the grand experiment. Fortunately, he was undisturbed that evening. Having lit his candle, and locked his door, with tremulous fingers he opened the papers enveloping the little phial; and glancing over their contents, got so inflamed with the numberless instances of its efficacy, detailed in brief but glowing terms—as—the "Duke of * * * * *—the Countess of * * * * *—the Earl of, &c., &c., &c.—the lovely Miss ———, the celebrated Sir Little Bull's-eye (who was so gratified that he allowed his name to be used)—all of whom, from having hair of the reddest possible description, were now possessed of raven-hued locks"—that he threw down the paper, and hurriedly got the cork out of the bottle. Having turned up his coat-cuffs, he commenced the application of the Cyanochaitanthropopoion, rubbing it into his hair, eyebrows, and whiskers, with all the energy he was capable of, for upwards of half-an-hour. Then he read over again every syllable on the papers in which the phial had been wrapped; and about eleven o'clock, having given sundry curious glances at the glass, got into bed, full of exciting hopes and delightful anxieties concerning the success of the great experiment he was trying. He could not sleep for several hours. He dreamed a rapturous dream—that he bowed to a gentleman with coal-black hair, whom he fancied he had seen before—and suddenly discovered that he was only looking at *himself* in a glass!!—This woke him. Up he jumped—sprung to his glass breathlessly—but ah! merciful Heavens! he almost dropped down dead! His hair was perfectly green—there could be no mistake about it. He

stood staring in the glass in speechless horror, his eyes and mouth distended to their utmost, for several minutes. Then he threw himself on the bed, and felt fainting. Up he presently jumped again in a kind of ecstasy—rubbed his hair desperately and wildly about—again looked into the glass—there it was, rougher than before; but eyebrows, whiskers, and head—all were, if anything, of a more vivid and brilliant green. Despair came over him. What had all his past troubles been to this?—what was to become of him? He got into bed again, and burst into a perspiration. Two or three times he got into and out of bed, to look at himself again—on each occasion deriving only more terrible confirmation than before of the disaster that had befallen him. After lying still for some minutes, he got out of bed, and kneeling down, tried to say his prayers; but it was in vain—and he rose half choked. It was plain he must have his head shaved, and wear a wig—that was making an old man of him at once. Getting more and more disturbed in his mind, he dressed himself, half determined on starting off to Bond Street, and breaking every pane of glass in the shop window of the cruel impostor who had sold him the liquid that had so frightfully disfigured him. As he stood thus irresolute, he heard the step of Mrs. Squallop approaching his door, and recollected that he had ordered her to bring up his tea-kettle about that time. Having no time to take his clothes off, he thought the best thing he could do would be to pop into bed again, draw his nightcap down to his ears and eyebrows, pretend to be asleep, and, turning his back towards the door, have a chance of escaping the observation of his landlady. No sooner thought of than done. Into bed he jumped, and drew the clothes over him—not aware, however, that in his hurry he had left his legs, with boots and trousers on, exposed to view—an unusual spectacle to his landlady, who had, in fact, scarcely ever known him in bed at so late an hour before. He lay as still as a mouse. Mrs. Squallop, after glancing with surprise at his legs, happening to direct her eyes towards the window, beheld a small phial, only half of whose dark contents were remaining—oh gracious!—of course it must be POISON, and Mr. Titmouse must be dead!—In a sudden fright she dropped the kettle, plucked the clothes off the trembling Titmouse, and cried out—“Oh, Mr. Titmouse! Mr. Titmouse! what *have* you been——”

“Well, ma’am, what the devil do you mean? How dare you——” commenced Titmouse, suddenly sitting up, and looking furiously at Mrs. Squallop. An inconceivably strange and horrid figure he looked. He had all his day clothes on; a white cotton nightcap was drawn down to his very eyes, like a man going to be hanged; his face was very pale, and his whiskers were of a bright green colour.

“Lard a-mighty!” exclaimed Mrs. Squallop faintly, the moment that this strange apparition presented itself; and, sinking on the chair, she pointed with a dismayed air to the ominous-looking object standing on the window shelf. Titmouse from that supposed she had found out the true state of the case.

“Well—*isn’t* it an infernal shame, Mrs. Squallop?” said he, getting off the bed, and, plucking off his nightcap, exhibited the full extent of his misfortune. “What’d’ye think of *that*!” he exclaimed, staring wildly at her. Mrs. Squallop gave a faint shriek, turned her head aside, and motioned him away.

“I shall go mad—I *shall*!” cried Titmouse, tearing his green hair.

“Oh Lord!—oh Lord!” groaned Mrs. Squallop, evidently expecting him to leap upon her. Presently, however, she a little recovered her presence of mind; and Titmouse, stuttering with fury, explained to her what had taken place. As he went on, Mrs. Squallop became less and less able to control herself and at length burst into a fit of convulsive laughter, and sat holding her hands to her fat shaking sides, as if she would have tumbled off her chair. Titmouse was almost on the point of striking her! At length, however, the fit went off; and, wiping her eyes, she expressed the greatest commiseration for him,

and proposed to go down and fetch up some soft soap and flannel, and try what "a good hearty wash would do." Scarce sooner said than done—but, alas, in vain. Scrub, scrub—lather, lather, did they both; but, the instant the soap-suds were washed off, there was the head as green as ever!

"Oh murder, murder! what *am* I to do, Mrs. Squallop?" groaned Titmouse, having taken another look at himself in the glass. "Why—really I'd be off to a police-office, and have 'em all taken up, if as how I was *you*!" quoth Mrs. Squallop. "No—See if I don't take that bottle, and make the fellow that sold it me swallow what's left—and I'll smash in his shop front besides!" "Oh you won't—you mustn't—not on no account! Stop at home a bit, and be quiet, it may go off with all this washing, in the course of the day. Soft soap is an uncommon strong thing for getting colours out—but—a—a—excuse me, Mr. Titmouse—why wasn't you satisfied with the hair God Almighty had given you? D'ye think He didn't know a deal better than you what was best for you? I'm blest if I don't think this is a judgment on you."

"What's the use of your standing preaching to me in this way, Mrs. Squallop?" said Titmouse, first with amazement, and then with fury in his manner—"A'n't I half mad without it? Judgment or no judgment—where's the harm of my wanting black hair any more than black trousers? That a'n't *your own* hair, Mrs. Squallop—you're as grey as a badger underneath—'pon my soul! I've often remarked it."

"I'll tell you what, Mr. himperance!" furiously exclaimed Mrs. Squallop, "you're a liar! And you deserve what you've got! It *is* a judgment, and I hope it will stick by you—so take *that* for your sauce, you vulgar fellow!" (snapping her fingers at him.) "Get rid of your green hair if you can! It's only carrot *tops* instead of carrot *roots*—and some likes one, some the other—ha! ha! ha!"

"I'll tell you what, Mrs. Squ—" he commenced, but she had gone, having slammed to the door behind her with all her force; and Titmouse was left alone in a half frantic state, in which he continued for nearly two hours. Once again he read over the atrocious puffs which had overnight inflated him to such a degree, and he now saw that they were all lies. This is a sample of them:—

"This divine fluid (as it was enthusiastically styled to the inventor, by the lovely Duchess of Doodle) possesses the inestimable and astonishing quality of changing hair, of whatever colour, to a dazzling jet black; at the same time imparting to it a rich glossy appearance, which wonderfully contributes to the imposing *tout ensemble* presented by those who use it. That well-known ornament of the circle of fashion, the young and lovely Mrs. Fitzfrippery, owned to the proprietor that to this surprising fluid it was that she was indebted for those unrivalled raven ringlets which attracted the eyes of envying and admiring crowds," and so forth. A little further on:—"This exquisite effect is not in *all cases* produced instantaneously; much will of course depend (as the celebrated M. Dupuytren, of the Hotel Dieu, at Paris informed the inventor) on the physical idiosyncrasy of the party using it, with reference to the constituent particles of the colouring matter constituting the fluid in the capillary vessels. Often a single application suffices to change the most hopeless-looking head of red hair to as deep a black; but, not unfrequently, the hair *passes through intermediate shades and tints*—all, however, ultimately settling into a deep and permanent black."

This passage not a little revived the drooping spirits of Titmouse. Accidentally, however an asterisk at the last word in the above sentence, directed his eye to a note at the bottom of the page, printed in such minute type as baffled any but the strongest sight and most determined eye to read, and which said note was the following:—

"Though cases *do*, undoubtedly, occasionally occur, in which the native in-

herent indestructible qualities of the hair defy all attempts at change or even modification, and resist even *this* potent remedy : of which, however, in all his experience " (the wonderful specific has been invented for about *six months*) "the inventor has known but very few instances." But to this exceedingly select class of unfortunate incurables, poor Titmouse, alas ! entertained a dismal suspicion that *he* belonged !

"Look, sir ! Look ! Only look here what your cursed stuff has done to my hair !" said Titmouse, on presenting himself soon after to the gentleman who had sold him the infernal liquid ; and, taking off his hat, exposed his green hair. The gentleman, however, did not appear at all surprised, or discomposed. "Ah—yes ! I see—I see. You're in the intermediate stage. It differs in different people——" "Differs, sir ! I'm going mad ! I look like a green monkey—Cuss me if I don't !" "In *me*, now, the colour was a strong *yellow*. But, have you read the explanations that are given in the wrapper ?"

"Read 'em ?" echoed Titmouse furiously—"I should think so ! Much good they do *me* ! Sir, you're a humbug !—an impostor ! I'm a sight to be seen for the rest of my life ! Look at me, sir ! Eyebrows, whiskers, and all !"

"Rather a singular appearance, just at present, I must own," said the gentleman, his face turning suddenly red all over with the violent effort he was making to prevent an explosion of laughter. He soon, however, recovered himself, and added coolly—"If you'll only persevere——" "Persevere be d——d !" interrupted Titmouse, violently clapping his hat on his head, "I'll teach you to *persevere* in taking in the public ! I'll have a warrant out against you in no time !" "Oh, my dear sir, I'm accustomed to all this !" said the gentleman coolly. "The—devil—you—are !" gasped Titmouse, quite aghast. "Oh, often—often, while the liquid is performing the first stage of the change ; but, in a day or two afterwards, the parties generally come back smiling into my shop, with heads as black as crows !" "No ! But really—do they, sir ?" interrupted Titmouse, drawing a long breath. "Hundreds, I may say thousands, my dear sir ! And one lady gave me a picture of herself, in her black hair, to make up for her abuse of me when it was in a puce colour—Fact, honour !" "But do you recollect any one's hair turning *green*, and then getting black ?" inquired Titmouse in trembling anxiety. "Recollect any ? Fifty at least. For instance, there was Lord Albert Addlehead—but why should I name names ? I know hundreds ! But everything is honour and confidential *here* !"

"And did Lord what's-his-name's hair go green, and then black ; and was it at first as light as mine ?" "His hair was redder, and in consequence it became greener, and now is blacker than ever yours will be."

"Well, if I and my landlady have this morning used an ounce, we've used a quarter of a pound of soft soap in——" "Soft soap !—soft soap !" cried out the gentleman with an air of sudden alarm—"That explains all" (he forgot how well it had already been explained by him.) "By Heavens, sir !—soft soap ? You may have ruined your hair for ever !" Titmouse opened his eyes and mouth with a start of terror, it not occurring to his reflecting mind that the intolerable green had preceded and caused, not followed, the use of the soft soap. "Go home, my dear sir ! God bless you—go home, as you value your hair ; take this small bottle of *Damascus Cream*, and rub it in before it's too late ; and then use the remainder of the——" "Then you don't think it's already too late ?" inquired Titmouse faintly ; and having been assured to the contrary—having asked the price of the *Damascus cream*, which was "*only three-and-six-pence*" (stamp included)—he paid it with a rueful air, and took his departure. He sneaked along the streets with the air of a pick-pocket, fearful that every one he met was an officer who had his eye on him. He was not, in fact, very far off the mark ; for many a person smiled, and stared, and turned round to look at him as he went along.

CHAPTER VI.

TITMOUSE slunk up-stairs to his room in a sad state of depression, and spent the next hour in rubbing into his hair the Damascus cream. He rubbed till he could hardly hold his arms up any longer, from sheer fatigue. Having risen at length to mark, from the glass, the progress he had made, he found that the only result of his persevering exertions had been to give a greasy shining appearance to the hair, that remained as green as ever. With a half-uttered groan he sunk down upon a chair, and fell into a sort of abstraction, which was interrupted by a sharp knock at his door. Titmouse started up, trembled, and stood for a moment or two irresolute, glancing fearfully at the glass; and then, opening the door, let in Mr. Gammon, who started back a pace or two, as if he had been shot, on catching sight of the strange figure of Titmouse. It was useless for Gammon to try to check his laughter; so, leaning against the doorpost, he yielded to the impulse, and laughed without intermission for at least two minutes. Titmouse felt desperately angry, but feared to show it; and the rueful, lackadaisical air with which he regarded the dreaded Mr. Gammon, only aggravated the agonies of that gentleman. When at length he had a little recovered himself, holding his left hand to his side, with an exhausted air, he entered the little apartment, and asked Titmouse what in the name of heaven he had been doing to himself: "*Without this*" (in the absurd slang of the lawyers) that he suspected most vehemently all the while quite well what Titmouse had been about; but he wished to hear Titmouse's own account of the matter!—Titmouse, not daring to hesitate, complied—Gammon listening in an agony of suppressed laughter. He looked as little at Titmouse as he could, and was growing a trifle more sedate, when Titmouse, in a truly lamentable tone, inquired, "What's the good, Mr. Gammon, of ten thousand a-year with such a horrid head of hair as this?" On hearing which Gammon jumped off his chair, started to the window, and laughed for one or two minutes without ceasing. This was too much for Titmouse, who presently cried aloud in a lamentable manner; and Gammon, suddenly ceasing his laughter, turned round and apologized in the most earnest manner; after which he uttered an abundance of sympathy for the sufferings which "he deplored being unable to alleviate." He even restrained himself when Titmouse again and again asked if he could not "have the law" of the man who had so imposed on him. Gammon diverted the thoughts of his suffering client, by taking from his pocket some very imposing packages of paper, tied round with red tape. From time to time, however, he almost split his nose with efforts to restrain his laughter, on catching a fresh glimpse of poor Titmouse's emerald hair. Mr. Gammon was a man of business, however; and in the midst of all this distracting excitement, contrived to get Titmouse's signature to sundry papers of no little consequence; amongst others, first, to a bond conditioned for the payment of £500; secondly, another for £10,000: and lastly, an agreement (of which he gave Titmouse an alleged copy) by which Titmouse, in consideration of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap using their best exertions to put him in possession of the estate, etc., etc., bound himself to conform to their wishes in everything, on pain of their instantly throwing up the whole affair, looking out for another heir-at-law (1) and issuing execution forthwith against Titmouse for all expenses incurred under his retainer. I said that Gammon gave his confiding client an *alleged* copy of this agreement;—it was not a real copy, for certain stipulations appeared in each that were not intended to appear in the other, for reasons which were perfectly satisfactory to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. When Gammon had got to this point, he thought it the fittest opportunity for producing a second five-pound note. He did so, and thereby put Titmouse into an

ecstasy, which pushed out of his head for a while all recollection of what had happened to his hair. He had at that moment nearly eleven pounds in hard cash! Gammon easily obtained from him an account of his little money transactions with Huckaback—of which, however, all he could tell was—that for ten shillings down, he had given a written engagement to pay fifty pounds on getting the estate. Of this Gammon made a careful memorandum, explaining the atrocious villany of Huckaback—and, in short, that if he (Titmouse) did not look very sharply about him, he would be robbed right and left; so that it was of the utmost consequence to him early to learn how to distinguish between false and true friends. Gammon went on to assure him that the instrument he had given to Huckaback was probably, in point of law, not worth a farthing, on the ground of its being both fraudulent and usurious; and intimated something, which Titmouse did not very distinctly comprehend, about the efficacy of a bill in equity for a *discovery*; which, at a very insignificant expense (not exceeding £100), would enable the plaintiff in equity to put the defendant in equity (*i.e.* Huckaback), in the way of declaring, on his solemn oath, that he had advanced the full sum of £50: and having obtained this important and satisfactory result, Titmouse would have the opportunity of disproving the statement of Huckaback—if he could; which, of course, he could not. By this process, however, a little profitable employment would have been afforded to a certain distinguished firm in Saffron Hill—and that was *something*—to Gammon.

“But, by the way, talking of money,” said Titmouse suddenly, “you can’t think how surprising handsome Mr. Tag-rag has behaved to me?” “Indeed, my dear sir!” exclaimed Gammon, with real curiosity, “what has he done?” “Advanced me five pounds—all of his own head!” “Are you serious, Mr. Titmouse?” inquired Gammon.

Titmouse produced the change which he had obtained for Tag-rag’s five-pound note, minus only the prices of the Cyanochaitanthropopoion, the Damascus cream, and the eye-glass. Gammon merely stroked his chin in a thoughtful manner. So occupied, indeed, was he with his reflections, that though his eye was fixed on the ludicrous figure of Titmouse, which so shortly before had occasioned him such paroxysms of laughter, he did not feel the least inclination even to a smile. Tag-rag advance Titmouse five pounds! Throwing as much smiling indifference into his manner as was possible, he asked Titmouse the particulars of so strange a transaction. Titmouse answered (how truly the reader can judge) that Mr. Tag-rag had, in the handsomest way, volunteered the loan of five pounds; and, moreover, offered him any further sum he might require!

“What a charming change, Mr. Titmouse!” exclaimed Gammon, with a watchful eye and anxious smile. “Most delightful, ’pon my soul!” “Rather sudden, too!—eh?—Mr. Titmouse?” “Why—no—no; I should say, ’pon my life, certainly not. The fact is, we’ve long misunderstood each other. He’s had an uncommon good opinion of me all the while—people *have* tried to set him against me; but it’s no use, he’s found them out—he told me so! And he’s not only said, but *done* the handsome thing! He’s turned up, by Jove, a trump all of a sudden—though it long looked an ugly card.”

“Ha, ha, ha?—very?—how curious!” exclaimed Mr. Gammon, mechanically revolving several important matters in his mind.

“I’m going, too, to dine at Satin Lodge, Mr. Tag-rag’s country house, next Sunday.” “Indeed? It will be quite a change for you, Mr. Titmouse!” “Yes, it will, by Jove; and—a—a—what’s more—there’s—hem!—you understand!” “Go on, I beg, my dear Mr. Titmouse—” “There’s a lady in the case—not that she’s *said* anything; but a nod’s as good as a wink to a blind horse—eh? Mr. Gammon?” “I should think so—Miss Tag-rag will have money, of course?” “You’ve hit it! Lots! But I’ve not made up my mind.”

[I'd better undeceive this poor devil at once, as to this sordid wretch Tag-rag (thought Gammon), otherwise the cunning old rogue may get a very mischievous hold upon him! And a *lady in the case*! The old scamp has a daughter! Whew! this will never do! The sooner I enlighten my young friend, the better—though at a little risk.]

"It's very important to be able to tell who are real and who false friends, as I was saying just now, my dear Titmouse," said Gammon seriously. "I think so. Now look, for instance, that fellow Huckaback. I should say *he*——" "Pho! pho! my dear sir, a mere beetle—he's not worth thinking of, one way or the other. But can't you guess another sham friend, who has changed so suddenly?" "Do you mean Mr. Tag-rag—eh?"

"I mention no names; but it's rather odd that when I am speaking of hollow-hearted friends, *you* should at once name Mr. Tag-rag." "The proof of the pudding—handsome is that handsome does; and I've got £5 of his money, at any rate." "Of course, he took no security for such a trifle, between such close friends as you and him?" "Oh—why now you mention it—But 'twas only a line—one line." "I knew it, my dear sir," interrupted Gammon calmly, with a significant smile—"Tag-rag and Huckaback, they're on a par—ah, ha, ha! My dear Titmouse, you are too honest and confiding!"

"What keen eyes you lawyers have, to be sure! Well—I never"—he was evidently somewhat staggered. "I—I must say," he presently added, looking gratefully at Gammon, "I think I *do* now know of a true friend, that sent me two five-pound notes, and never asked for any security." "My dear sir, you really pain me by alluding to such a matter!"

[Oh, Gammon, is not this too bad! What are the papers which you know are now in your pocket, signed only this very evening by Titmouse?]

"You are not a match for Tag-rag, Titmouse; because he was *made* for a tradesman—you are not. Do you think he would have parted with his £5 but for value received? Oh Tag-rag! Tag-rag!" "I—I really begin to think, Mr. Gammon—pon my soul, I do think you're right." "Think!—Why—for a man of your acuteness—how could he imagine you could forget the long course of insult and tyranny which you have endured under him; that he should change all of a sudden—just now, when——" "Ay, by Jove! just when I'm coming into my property," interrupted Titmouse quickly. "To be sure—to be sure! Just now, I say, to make this sudden change! Bah! bah!" "I hate Tag-rag, and always did. Now, he's trying to take me in, just as he does everybody; but I've found him out; I won't lay out a penny with him!" "Would you, do you think, ever have seen the inside of Satin Lodge, if you hadn't——" "Why, I don't know; I really think—hem!" "Would you, my dear sir?—But now a scheme occurs to me—a very amusing idea indeed! Ah, ha, ha!—Shall I tell you a way of proving to his own face how insincere and interested he is towards you? Go to dinner by all means, eat his good things, hear all that the whole set of them have to say, and just before you go (it will require you to have your wits about you), pretend, with a long face, that our affair is all a bottle of smoke: say that Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap have told you the day before that they had made a horrid mistake, and you were the wrong man——"

"Pon my life, I—I—really," stammered Titmouse, "daren't—I couldn't—I couldn't keep it up—he'd half kill me. Besides, there will be Miss Tag-rag—it would be the death of her, I know."

"Miss Tag-rag! Gracious Heavens! What on earth can you have to do with *her*? You—why, if you really succeed in getting this fine property, she might make a very suitable wife for one of your grooms—ah, ha!—But for *you*—absurd!"

"Ah! I don't know—she may be a devilish fine girl, and the old fellow will

have a tolerable penny to leave her—and a bird in the hand—eh? Besides, I know what she's all along thought—hem!—but that doesn't signify.”

“Pho! pho! Ridiculous! Ha, ha, ha! Fancy Miss Tag-rag Mrs. Titmouse! Your eldest son—ah, ah, ha! Tag-rag Titmouse, Esq. Delightful! Your honoured father a draper in Oxford Street!” All this might be very clever, but it did not seem to *tell* upon Titmouse, whose little heart had been reached by a cunning hint of Tag-rag's, concerning his daughter's flattering estimate of Titmouse's personal appearance. The reason why Gammon attacked so seriously a matter which appeared so chimerical and preposterous, was this—that, according to his present plan, Titmouse was to remain for some considerable while at Tag-rag's, and, with his utter weakness of character, might be worked upon by Tag-rag and his daughter, and get inveigled into an engagement which might be productive, hereafter, of no little embarrassment. He succeeded, however, at length, in obtaining Titmouse's promise to adopt his suggestion, and thereby discover the true nature of the feelings entertained towards him at Satin Lodge. He shook Titmouse energetically by the hand, and left him perfectly certain, that if there was one person in the world worthy of his esteem, and even reverence, that person was Oily Gammon, Esq.

As he bent his steps towards Saffron Hill, he reflected rather anxiously on several matters that had occurred to him during the interview which I have just described. On reaching the office, he was presently closeted with Mr. Quirk, to whom, first and foremost, he exhibited and delivered the documents to which he had obtained Titmouse's signature, and which the reader will allow me to assure him, were of a somewhat different texture from a certain legal instrument or security which I laid before him some little time ago.

“Now, Gammon,” said the old gentleman, as soon as he had locked up in his safe the above-mentioned documents—“Now, Gammon, I think we may be up and at 'em; load our guns, and blaze away,” and he rubbed his hands.

“Perhaps so, Mr. Quirk,” replied Gammon; “but we must, for no earthly consideration, be premature in our operations! Let me, by the way, tell you one or two little matters that have just occurred to Titmouse!”—Then he told Mr. Quirk of the effects which had followed the use of the potent Cyanochaitanthropopoion, at which old Quirk almost laughed himself into fits. When, however, Gammon, with a serious air, mentioned the name of Miss Tag-rag, and his grave suspicions concerning her, Quirk bounced up out of his chair, almost startling Gammon out of *his*. If he had just been told that his banker had broke, he could scarce have shown more emotion.

The fact was, that he, too, had a daughter—an only child—Miss Quirk—whom he had destined to become Mrs. Titmouse.

“A designing old villain!” he exclaimed at length, and Gammon agreed with him; but, strange to say, with all his acuteness, never adverted to the real cause of Quirk's sudden and vehement exclamation. When Gammon told him of the manner in which he had opened Titmouse's eyes to the knavery of Tag-rag, and the expedient he had suggested for its demonstration, Quirk could have worshipped Gammon, and could not help rising and shaking him very energetically by the hand, much to his astonishment. After a long consultation, two things were agreed upon by the partners; to look out fresh lodgings for Titmouse, and remove him presently altogether from the company and influence of Tag-rag. Some time after they had parted, Quirk came with an eager air into Mr. Gammon's room, with a most important suggestion; whether it would not be possible for them to get Tag-rag to *become a surety* to them, by and by, on behalf of Titmouse? Gammon was delighted!—He heartily commended Mr. Quirk's sagacity, and promised to turn it about in his thoughts very carefully. Not having been let entirely into Quirk's policy (of which the reader has, however, just had a glimpse), Mr. Gammon did not see the difficulties

which kept Quirk awake almost all that night; viz., how to protect Titmouse from the machinations of Tag-rag and his daughter, and yet keep Tag-rag sufficiently interested in, and intimate with, Titmouse, to entertain, by and by, the idea of becoming surety for him to them, the said Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and—withal—how to manage Titmouse all the while, so as to forward their objects, and also that of turning his attention towards Miss Quirk; all this formed really rather a difficult problem!—Quirk looked down on Tag-rag with honest indignation, as a mean and mercenary fellow, whose unprincipled schemes, thank Heaven! he already saw through, and from which he resolved to rescue his innocent and confiding client, who was made for better things—to wit, *Miss Quirk*.

When Titmouse rose the next morning (Saturday), behold—he found his hair had become of a variously shaded purple or violet colour! Astonishment and apprehension by turns possessed him, as he stared into the glass, at this unlooked-for change of colour; and hastily dressing himself, after swallowing a very slight breakfast, off he went once more to the scientific establishment in Bond Street, to which he had been indebted for his recent delightful experiences. The distinguished inventor and proprietor of the *Cyanochaitanthropopoion* was behind the counter as usual—calm and confident as ever.

“Ah! I see—as I said! as I said!” quoth he, with a sort of glee in his manner. “Isn’t it?—coming round quicker than usual—Really, I’m selling more of the article than I can possibly make.”

“Well,”—at length said Titmouse, as soon as he had recovered from the surprise occasioned by the sudden volubility with which he had been assailed on entering—“then *is* it really going on tolerable well?” taking off his hat, and looking anxiously into a glass that hung close by.

“*Tolerable* well, my dear sir! Delightful! Perfect! Couldn’t be better! If you’d studied the thing, you’d know, sir, that purple is the middle colour between green and black. Indeed, black’s only purple and green mixed, which explains the whole thing!” Titmouse listened with infinite satisfaction to this philosophical statement.

“Remember, sir—my hair is to come like yours—eh? you recollect, sir? Honour—that was the bargain, you know!”

“I have very little doubt of it, sir—nay, I am certain of it, knowing it by experience.”

[The scamp had been hired expressly for the purpose of lying thus in support of the *Cyanochaitanthropopoion*; his own hair being a natural black.]

“I’m going to a grand dinner to-morrow, sir,” said Titmouse, “with some devilish great people, at the west end of the town—eh? you understand? will it do by that time? Would give a trifle to get my hair a shade darker by that time—for—hem!—most lovely girl—eh? you understand the thing?—devilish anxious, and all that sort of thing, you know!”

“Yes—I do,” replied the gentleman of the shop, in a confidential tone; and opening one of the glass doors behind him, took out a bottle considerably larger than the first, and handed it to Titmouse. “This,” said he, “will complete the thing; it combines chemically with the purple particles, and the result is—generally arrived at in about two days’ time——” “But it will do *something* in a night’s time—eh?—surely.” “I should think so! But here it is—it is called the *Tetaragmenon Abracadabra*.” “Whata name!” exclaimed Titmouse with a kind of awe. “’Pon honour, it almost takes one’s breath away——” “It will do more, sir; it will take your red hair away! By the way, only the day before yesterday, a lady of high rank (between ourselves, Lady Caroline Carrot), whose red hair always seemed as if it would have set her bonnet in a blaze—ha, ha!—came here, after two days’ use of the *Cyanochaitanthropopoion*, and one day’s use of this *Tetaragmenon Abracadabra*—and asked me if I knew

her. Upon my soul I did not, till she solemnly assured me she was really Lady Caroline ! ”

“ *How* much is it ? ” eagerly inquired Titmouse, thrusting his hand into his pocket, with no little excitement. “ Only nine-and-sixpence. ” “ Oh, my stars, what a price ! Nine-and-six — ” “ Ah, but would you have believed it, sir ? This extraordinary fluid cost a great German chemist his whole life to bring to perfection ; and it contains expensive materials from all the four corners of the world ! ” “ That may be—but really—I’ve laid out a large figure with you, sir, this day or two ! Couldn’t you say eight sh— ”

“ We never abate, sir ; it’s not *our* style of doing business,” replied the gentleman, in a manner that quite overawed poor Titmouse, who at once bought this, the third abomination ; not a little depressed, however, at the heavy prices he had paid for the three bottles, and the uncertainty he felt as to the ultimate issue. That night he was so well satisfied with the progress which the hair on his head was making (for, by candle-light, it really looked much darker than could have been expected), that he resolved—at all events for the present—to leave well alone ; or at the utmost, to try the effects of the Tetraragmenon Abracadabra only upon his eyebrows and whiskers. Into them he rubbed the new specific ; which, on the bottle being opened, surprised him in two respects : first, it was perfectly colourless ; secondly, it had a most infernal smell. However, it was no use hesitating : he had bought and paid for it ; and the papers it was folded in gave an account of its success that was really irresistible and unquestionable. Away, therefore, he rubbed ; and when he had finished, got into bed, in humble hope as to the result, which would be disclosed by the morning’s light. But, alas ! would you have believed it ? When he looked at himself in the glass, about six o’clock (at which hour he awoke), I protest it is a fact, that his eyebrows and whiskers were as white as snow ; which, combining with the purple colour of the hair on his head, rendered him one of the most astounding objects (in human shape) the eye of man had ever beheld. There was the wisdom of age seated in his eyebrows and whiskers, unspeakable youthful folly in his features, and a purple crown of wonder on his head.

Really, it seemed as if the devil were wreaking his spite on Mr. Titmouse ; nay, perhaps it was the devil himself who had served him with the bottle in Bond Street. Or was it a mere ordinary servant of the devil—some greedy, impudent, unprincipled speculator, who, desirous of acting on the approved maxim—*Fiat experimentum in corpore vili*—had pitched on Titmouse (seeing the sort of person he was) as a godsend, quite reckless what effect he produced on his hair, so as the stuff was paid for, and its effects noted ? It might possibly have been sport to the gentleman of the shop, but it was near proving death to poor Titmouse, who really might have resolved on throwing himself out of the window, only that he saw it was not big enough for a baby to get through. He turned aghast at the monstrous object which his little glass presented to him ; and sunk down upon the bed with a feeling as if he were now fit for death. As before, Mrs. Squallop made her appearance with his kettle for breakfast. He was sitting at the table dressed, and with his arms folded, with a reckless air, not at all caring to conceal the new and still more frightful change which he had undergone since she saw him last. Mrs. Squallop stared at him for a second or two in silence ; then, stepping back out of the room, suddenly drew to the door, and stood outside, laughing vehemently.

“ I’ll kick you down-stairs ! ” shouted Titmouse, rushing to the door, pale with fury, and pulling it open.

“ Mr.—Mr.—Titmouse, you’ll be the death of me—you will—you will ! ” gasped Mrs. Squallop, almost black in the face, and the water running out of the kettle, which she was unconsciously holding in a slant. After a while, however, they got reconciled. Mrs. Squallop had fancied he had been but

rubbing chalk on his eyebrows and whiskers ; and seemed dismayed, indeed, on hearing the true state of the case. He implored her to send out for a small bottle of ink ; but as it was Sunday morning none could be got ; and she teased him to try a little blacking ! He did—but, of course, it was useless. He sat for an hour or two in an ecstasy of grief and rage. What would he now have given never to have meddled with the hair which Heaven had thought fit to send him into the world with ? Alas, with what mournful force Mrs. Squallop's words again and again recurred to him ! To say that he ate breakfast would be scarcely correct. He drank a single cup of cocoa, and ate about three inches' length and thickness of a roll, and then put away his breakfast things on the window shelf. If he had been in the humour to go to church, how could he ? He would have been turned out as an object involuntarily exciting everybody to laughter !

Yet poor soul, in this extremity of misery, he was not utterly neglected ; for he had that morning quite a little levee. First came Mr. Snap, who, having quite as keen and clear an eye for his own interest as his senior partners, had early seen how capable was acquaintance with Titmouse of being turned to his (Snap's) great advantage. He had come, therefore, dressed very stylishly, to do a little bit of toadying on the sly (on his own exclusive account) ; and had brought with him, for the edification of Titmouse, a copy of that day's *Sunday Flash*, which contained a long account of a fight between Birmingham Bigbones and London Littlego, for £500 a-side (sixty rounds had been fought, both men killed, and their seconds had bolted to Boulogne). Poor Snap, however, though he had come with the best intentions, and the most anxious wish to evince profound respect for the future master of ten thousand a-year, was quite taken by storm by the very first glimpse he got of Titmouse, and could not for a long while recover himself. He had come to ask Titmouse to dine with him at a tavern in the Strand, where there was to be capital singing in the evening ; and also to accompany him, on the ensuing morning, to the Old Bailey, to hear "a most interesting trial" for bigamy, in which Snap was concerned for the prisoner—a miscreant, who had been married to five living women. Snap conceived (and very justly) that it would give Titmouse a striking idea of his (Snap's) importance, to see him so much, and apparently so familiarly concerned with well-known counsel. In his own terse and quaint way, he was explaining to Titmouse the various remedies he had against the Bond Street impostor, both by indictment and action on the case ; nay (getting a little, however, beyond his depth), he assured the eager Titmouse that a bill of discovery would lie in equity, to ascertain what the Tetaragmenon Abracadabra was composed of, with a view to his preferring an indictment against its owner, when his learned display was interrupted by a double knock, and—oh, mercy on us !—enter Mr. Gammon. Whether he or Snap felt more disconcerted, I cannot say ; but Snap *looked* the most confused and sneaking. Each told the other a lie, in as easy, good-natured a way as he could assume, concerning the object of his visit to Titmouse. Thus they were going on, when—another knock—and, "Is this Mr. Titmouse's ?" inquired a voice, which brought a little colour into the face of both Gammon and Snap ; for it was absolutely old Quirk, who bustled breathless into the room, on his first visit, and seemed completely confounded by the sight of both his partners. What with this, and the amazing appearance presented by Titmouse, Mr. Quirk was so overwhelmed that he scarce spoke a syllable. Each of the three partners felt (in his own way) exquisite embarrassment. Huckaback, some time afterwards, made his appearance, but *him* Titmouse unceremoniously dismissed in a twinkling, in spite of a vehement remonstrance. But presently, behold another arrival—Mr. Tag-rag, who had come to announce that his carriage (*i.e.*, a queer, rickety, little one-horse chaise, with a tallow-faced boy in it, in faded livery), was waiting to

convey Mr. Titmouse to Satin Lodge, and take him a long drive in the country ! Each of these four worthies could have spit in the other's face : first for *detecting*, and, secondly, for *rivaling* him in his schemes upon Titmouse. A few minutes after the arrival of Tag-rag, Gammon, half-choked with disgust, and despising himself even more than his fellow-visitors, slunk off, followed almost immediately by Quirk, who was dying to consult him on this new aspect of affairs which had presented itself. Snap (who, ever since the arrival of Messrs. Quirk and Gammon, had felt like an ape on hot irons) very shortly followed in the footsteps of his partners, having made no engagement whatever with Titmouse ; and thus the enterprising and determined Tag-rag was left master of the field. He had in fact come to *do business*, and business he determined to do. As for Gammon, during the short time he had stayed, how he had endeared himself to Titmouse, by explaining, not aware that Titmouse had confessed all to Snap, the singular change in the colour of his hair to have been occasioned simply by the intense mental anxiety through which he had lately passed ! The anecdotes he told of sufferers, whose hair a single night's agony had changed to all the colours of the rainbow ? Though Tag-rag outstayed all his fellow-visitors, in the manner which has been described, he could not prevail upon Titmouse to accompany him in his "carriage," for Titmouse pleaded a pressing engagement (*i. e.*, a desperate attempt he purposed making to obtain some *ink*), but pledged himself to make his appearance at Satin Lodge at the appointed hour (half-past three for four o'clock). Away, therefore, drove Tag-rag, delighted that Satin Lodge would so soon contain so resplendent a visitor—indignant at the cringing, sycophantic attentions of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, against whom he resolved to put Titmouse on his guard, and infinitely astonished at the extraordinary change that had taken place in the colour of Titmouse's hair. Partly influenced by the explanation which Gammon had given of the phenomenon, Tag-rag resigned himself to feelings of simple wonder. Titmouse was doubtless passing through stages of physical transmutation, corresponding with the marvellous change that was taking place in his circumstances ;—and for all he (Tag-rag) knew, other and more extraordinary changes were going on ; Titmouse might be growing at the rate of half-an-inch a-day, and soon stand before him a man more than six feet high ! My friend Tittlebat made his appearance at the gate of Satin Lodge, at about a quarter to four o'clock. Good gracious how he had dressed himself out ! He considerably exceeded his appearance when first presented to the reader.

Miss Tag-rag had been before her glass ever since the instant of her return from chapel, up to within ten minutes' time of Titmouse's arrival. An hour and a half at least had she bestowed on her hair, disposing it in little corkscrew and somewhat scanty curls, that quite glistened in bear's grease, hanging on each side of a pair of lean and sallow cheeks. The colour which ought to have distributed itself over her cheeks, in roseate delicacy, had thought fit to collect itself into the tip of her sharp little nose. Her small grey eyes beamed with the gentle and attractive expression that was perceptible in her father's, and her projecting under lip reminded everybody of that delicate feature in her mother. She was very short, and her figure rather skinny and angular. She wore her lilac-coloured frock ; her waist being pinched in to a degree that made you think of a fit of the colic when you looked at her. A long red sash, tied in a most elaborate bow, gave a very brilliant air to her dress generally. She had a thin gold chain round her neck, and wore long white gloves ; her left hand holding her pocket-handkerchief, which she had suffused with bergamotte that scented the whole room. Mrs. Tag-rag had made herself very splendid, in a red silk gown and staring head-dress ; in fact, she seemed *on fire*. As for Mr. Tag-rag, whenever he was dressed in his Sunday clothes, he looked the model of a dissenting minister ; in his black coat, waistcoat, and trousers, and

primly-tied white neckerchief, with no shirt-collar visible. For a quarter of an hour had this interesting trio been standing at their parlour window, in anxious expectation of Titmouse's arrival. How was it that, though both the ladies had sat under a thundering discourse from Mr. Dismal Horror that morning—they had never once since thought or spoke of him or his sermon—never even opened his "*Groans*?" The reason was plain. They thought of Titmouse, who was bringing "airs from heaven;" while Horror brought only "blasts from hell"—and *those* they had every day in the week (his sermons on the Sunday, his "*Groans*" on the week day). At length Miss Tag-rag's little heart fluttered violently, for her papa told her that Titmouse was coming up the road—and so he was. Not dreaming that he could be seen, he stood beside the gate for a moment, under the melancholy laburnum; and, taking a dirty-looking silk handkerchief out of his hat, slapped it vigorously about his boots (from which circumstance it may be inferred that he had walked), and replaced it in his hat. Then he unbuttoned his surtout, adjusted it nicely, and disposed his chain and eyeglass just so as to let the tip of the latter be seen peeping out of his waistcoat; twitched up his collars, plucked down his wristbands, drew the tip of a white pocket-handkerchief out of the pocket in the breast of his surtout, pulled a white glove half-way on his left hand; and, having thus given the finishing touches to his toilet, opened the gate, and—Tittlebat Titmouse, Esquire, the great guest of the day, for the first time in his life (swinging a little ebony cane about with careless grace) entered the domain of Mr. Tag-rag.

The little performance I have been describing, though every bit of it passing under the eyes of Tag-rag, his wife, and his daughter, had not excited a smile; their anxious feelings were too deep to be reached or stirred by light emotions. Miss Tag-rag turned very pale and trembled.

"La, pa!" said she faintly, "how could you say he'd got white eyebrows and whiskers? Why—they're a beautiful *black*!"

Tag-rag was speechless: the fact was so—for Titmouse had fortunately succeeded in obtaining a little bottle of ink, which he had applied with great effect. As Titmouse approached the house (Tag-rag hurrying out to open the door for him), he saw the two ladies standing at the windows. Off went his hat, and out dropped the silk handkerchief, not a little disconcerting him for the moment. Tag-rag, however, soon occupied his attention at the door with anxious civilities, shaking him by the hand, hanging up his hat and stick, and then introducing him to the sitting-room. The ladies received him with the most profound curtsies, which Titmouse returned with a quick embarrassed bow, and an indistinct—"I hope you're well, mem?"

If they had had presence of mind enough to observe it, the purple colour of Titmouse's hair must have surprised them not a little; all they could see, however, was—the angelic owner of ten thousand a-year.

The only person tolerably at his ease, and he *only* tolerably, was Mr. Tag-rag; and he asked his guest—"Wash your hands, Titmouse, before dinner?" But Titmouse said he had washed them before he had come out. [The day was hot, and he had walked five miles at a slapping pace.] In a few minutes, however, he felt a little more assured; for it was impossible for him not to perceive the awful deference with which he was treated. "Seen the *Sunday Flash*, mem?" said he modestly, addressing Mrs. Tag-rag. "I—I—that is—not *to-day*," she replied, colouring. "Vastly amusing, isn't it?" interposed Tag-rag, to prevent mischief, for he knew his wife would as soon have taken a cockatrice into her hand. "Ye—e—s," replied Titmouse, who had not even glanced at the copy which Snap had brought him. "An uncommon good fight between Birmingham Big——"

Tag-rag saw his wife getting redder and redder. "No news stirring about Ministers, is there?" said he, with a desperate attempt at a diversion. "Not

that I have heard," replied Titmouse. Soon he got a little further, and said how cheerful the stages going past must make the house. Tag-rag agreed with him. Then there was a little pause.

"Been to church, mem, this morning, mem?" timidly inquired Titmouse of Miss Tag-rag. "Yes, sir," she replied, faintly colouring, casting her eyes to the ground, and suddenly putting her hand into that of her mother—with such an innocent, engaging simplicity—like a timid fawn lying as close as possible to its dam! "We always go to *chapel*, sir," said Mrs. Tag-rag confidently, in spite of a very fierce look from her husband; "the gospel isn't preached in the Church of England. We sit under Mr. Horror—a heavenly preacher! You've heard of Mr. Horror?" "Yes, mem! Oh, yes! Capital preacher!" replied Titmouse, who of course (being a true churchman) had never in his life heard of Mr. Horror, or any other dissenter.

"When *will* dinner be ready, Mrs. T.?" inquired Tag-rag abruptly, and with a very perceptible dash of sternness in his tone; but dinner was announced the very next moment. He took his wife's arm, and in doing so, gave it a sudden vehement pressure, which, coupled with a furious glance, explained to her the extent to which she had incurred his anger. She thought, however, of Mr. Horror, and was silent.

Titmouse's proffered arm the timid Miss Tag-rag scarcely touched with the tip of her finger, as she walked beside him to dinner. Titmouse soon got tolerably composed and cheerful at dinner (which consisted of a little piece of nice roast beef, with plenty of horse-radish, Yorkshire pudding, a boiled fowl, a plum-pudding made by Mrs. Tag-rag, and custards which had been superintended by Miss Tag-rag), and, to oblige his hospitable host and hostess, ate till he was fit to burst. Miss Tag-rag, though really very hungry, ate only a very small slice of beef and a quarter of a custard, and drank a third of a glass of sherry after dinner. She never once spoke, except in hurried answers to her papa and mamma; and, sitting exactly opposite Titmouse (with only a plate of greens and a boiled fowl between them), was continually colouring whenever their eyes happened to encounter one another, on which occasion hers would suddenly drop, as if overpowered by the brilliance of his. Titmouse began to love her very fast. After the ladies had withdrawn, you should have heard the way that Tag-rag went on with Titmouse.

Titmouse swallowed with equal facility Mr. Tag-rag's hard port and his soft blarney; but *all* fools have large swallows. When at length Tag-rag alluded to the painfully evident embarrassment of his "poor Tabby," and said he had "now found out what had been so long the matter with her" [ay, even this went down], and hemmed, and winked his eye, and drained his glass, Titmouse began to get flustered, blushed, and hoped Mr. Tag-rag would soon "join the ladies." They did so (Tag-rag stopping behind to lock up the wine and the remains of the fruit). Miss Tag-rag presided over the tea-things. There were muffins, and crumpets, and reeking-hot buttered toast; Mrs. Tag-rag would hear of no denial, so poor Titmouse, after the most desperate resistance, was obliged to swallow a round of toast, half a muffin, and an entire crumpet, and four cups of hot tea; after which he felt a very painful degree of turgidity, and a miserable conviction that he should be able to eat and drink nothing more for the remainder of the week.

After the tea-things had been removed, Tag-rag, directing Titmouse's attention to the piano, which was open (with some music on it ready to be played from), asked him whether he liked music. Titmouse, with great eagerness, hoped Miss T. would give them some music; and she, holding out a long and vigorous siege, at length asked her papa what it should be. "*The Battle of Prague*," said her papa. "*Before Jehovah's awful throne*," hastily interposed her mamma. "The Battle," sternly repeated her papa. "It's Sunday night,

Mr. T.," meekly rejoined his wife. "Which will *you* have, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired Tag-rag, with *The Battle of Prague* written in every feature of his face. Titmouse almost burst into a state of perspiration. "A little of both, sir, if you please."

"Well," replied Tag-rag, slightly relaxing, "that will do. Split the difference—eh? Come? Tab, down with you. Titmouse, will you turn over the music for her?"

Titmouse rose, and having sheepishly taken his station beside Miss Tag-rag, the performances commenced with *Before Jehovah's awful throne!* But, mercy upon us! at what a rate she rattled over that "pious air." If its respectable composer had been present, he must have gone into a fit; but there was no help for it—the heart of the lovely performer was in *The Battle of Prague*, to which she presently did most ample justice. So much were her feelings engaged in that sublime composition, that the bursting of the strings—twang! in the middle of the "*cannonading*," did not at all disturb her; and, as soon as she had finished the exquisite "*finale*," Titmouse was in such a tumult of excitement, from different causes, that he could have shed tears. Though he had never once turned over at the right place, Miss Tag-rag thanked him for his services with a smile of infinite sweetness. Titmouse vowed he had never heard such splendid music—begged for more: and away went Miss Tag-rag, hurried away by her excitement. Rondo after Rondo, march after march, for at least half-an-hour; at the end of which old Tag-rag suddenly kissed her with passionate fondness. Though Mrs. Tag-rag was horrified at the impiety of all this, she kept a very anxious eye on the young couple, and interchanged with her husband, every now and then, very significant looks. Shortly after nine, spirits, wine, and hot and cold water, were brought in. At the sight of them Titmouse looked alarmed—for he knew that he must take something more, though he would have freely given five shillings to be excused—for he felt as if he could not hold one drop more. But it was in vain. Willy-nilly, a glass of gin and water stood before him; soon he protested he could not touch it unless Miss Tag-rag would "take something"—whereupon, with a blush, she "thought she *would*" take a wine-glassful of sherry and water. This was provided her. Then Tag-rag mixed a tumbler of port-wine negus for Mrs. Tag-rag, and a great glass of mahogany-coloured brandy and water for himself; and then he looked round, and felt perfectly happy. As Titmouse advanced with his gin and water, his spirits got higher and higher, and his tongue more fluent. He once or twice dropped the "Mr.," when addressing Tag-rag; several times smiled, and once even winked at the embarrassed Miss Tag-rag. Mr. Tag-rag saw it and could not control himself—for he had got to the end of his first glass of brandy and water, and mixed himself a second quite as strong as the former.

"Tab! ah, Tab! what *has* been the matter with you all these months?"—and he winked his eye at her and then at Titmouse. "Papa!" exclaimed Miss Tag-rag, blushing up to her very temples. "Ah, Titmouse—Titmouse—give me your hand," said Tag-rag; "you'll forget us all when you're a great man—but we shall always remember you."

"You're very good—very?" said Titmouse, cordially returning the pressure of Tag-rag's hand.—At that instant it suddenly occurred to him to adopt the suggestion of Mr. Gammon. Tag-rag was going on very fast, indeed, about the disinterested nature of his feelings towards Titmouse; towards whom, he said, he had always felt just as he did at that moment—'twas in vain to deny it.

"I am sure your conduct shows it, sir," commenced Titmouse, feeling a shudder like that with which a timid bather approaches the margin of the cold stream. "I could have taken my oath, sir, you would have refused to let me come into your house, when you heard of it——" "Ah ha!—that's *rather* an odd idea, too. If I felt a true friendship for you as plain Titmouse, it's so

likely I should have *cut* you just when—ahem! My dear sir! it was *I* that thought *you* wouldn't have come into *my* house! A likely thing!"

Titmouse was puzzled. His perceptions, never very quick or clear, were now undoubtedly somewhat obfuscated with what he had been drinking. In short, he did not understand that Tag-rag had not understood *him*; and felt rather baffled.

"What surprising ups and downs there are in life, Mr. Titmouse!" said Mrs. Tag-rag respectfully—"they're all sent from above, to try us! No one knows how they'd behave, if as how (in a manner) they were turned upside down." "I—I hope, mem, I haven't done anything to show that *I*——" "Oh! my dear Titmouse," anxiously interrupted Tag-rag, inwardly cursing his wife, who, finding she always went wrong in her husband's eyes whenever she spoke a word, determined for the future to stick to her negus—"the fact is, there's a Mr. Horror here that's for sending all decent people to——. He's filled my wife there with all sorts of —— nay, if she isn't bursting with cant—so never mind her. *You* done anything wrong! *You're* a pattern of modesty and propriety—your hand, my dear Titmouse!"

"Well—I'm a happy man again," resumed Titmouse, resolved now to go on with his adventure. "And when did they tell you of it, sir?" "Oh, a few days ago—a week ago," replied Tag-rag, trying to recollect. "Why—why—sir—a'n't you mistaken?" inquired Titmouse, with a depressed, but at the same time a surprised air. "It only happened this morning, after you left ——" "Eh?—eh?—ah, ha!—What *do* you mean, Mr. Titmouse?" interrupted Tag-rag, with a faint attempt at a smile. Mrs. Tag-rag and Miss Tag-rag also turned exceedingly startled faces towards Titmouse, who felt as if a house were going to fall down on him. "Why, sir," he began to cry (an attempt which was greatly aided by the maudlin condition to which drink had reduced him), "till to-day, I thought I was heir of ten thousand a-year, and it seems I'm not; it's all a mistake of those cursed people at Saffron Hill!"

Tag-rag's face changed visibly, and showed the desperate shock he had just sustained. His inward agony was forcing out on his slanting forehead great drops of perspiration.

"What—a—capital—joke—Mr. Titmouse—ah, ha!"—he gasped, hastily passing his handkerchief over his forehead. Titmouse, though greatly alarmed, stood to his gun pretty steadily. "I—I wish it was a joke! It's been no joke to *me*, sir. There's another Tittlebat Titmouse, it seems, in Shoreditch, that's the right——" "Who told you this, sir? Pho, I don't—I can't believe it," said Tag-rag, in a voice tremulous between suppressed rage and fear. "True though, 'pon my life! It *is*, so help me——" "How dare you swear before ladies, sir? You're insulting them, sir!" cried Tag-rag, trembling with rage. "And in my presence, sir? You're not a gentleman!" He suddenly dropped his voice, and in a trembling and most earnest manner, asked Titmouse whether he was really joking or serious.

"Never more serious in my life, sir; and enough to make me so, sir!" replied Titmouse, in a lamentable manner. "You mean to tell me it's all a mistake, then, and you're no more than you always were?" inquired Tag-rag, with a desperate attempt to speak calmly. "Oh yes, sir! Yes!" cried Titmouse mournfully; "and if you'll only be so kind as to let me serve you as I used. You know it was no fault of *mine*, sir. They *would* tell me it was so!"

'Tis impossible to conceive a more disgusting expression than the repulsive features of Tag-rag wore at that moment, while he gazed in ominous and agitated silence at Titmouse. His lips quivered, and he seemed incapable of speaking.

"Oh, ma, I do feel *so* ill!" faintly exclaimed Miss Tag-rag, turning deadly pale. Titmouse was on the verge of dropping on his knees and confessing the

trick, greatly agitated at the effect produced on Miss Tag-rag; when Tag-rag's heavy hand was suddenly placed on his shoulder, and he whispered in a fierce undertone—"You're an impostor, sir!" which arrested Titmouse, and made something like a man of him. He was a fearful fool but he did not want for mere *pluck*; and now it was roused. Mrs. Tag-rag exclaimed, "Oh, you shocking scamp!" as she passed Titmouse and led her daughter out of the room.

"Then an impostor, sir, a'n't fit company for *you*, of course, sir!" said Titmouse, rising, and trembling with mingled apprehension and anger. "Pay me my five-pound note!" almost shouted Tag-rag, furiously tightening the grasp by which he held Titmouse's collar.

"Well, sir, and I will, if you'll only take your hand off! Hollo, sir—What the de—Leave go, sir! Hands off! Are you going to murder me? I'll pay you, and done with you, sir," stammered Titmouse:—when a faint scream was heard, plainly from Miss Tag-rag, overhead, and in hysterics. Then the seething caldron boiled over. "You *infernal* scoundrel!" said Tag-rag, almost choked with fury; and suddenly seizing Titmouse by the collar, scarce giving him time, in passing, to get hold of his hat and stick, he urged him along through the passage, down the gravel walk, threw open the gate, thrust him furiously through it, and sent after him such a blast of execration, as was enough to drive him a hundred yards down the road. Titmouse did not fully recover his breath or his senses for a long while afterwards. When he did, the first thing he felt was an inclination to fall down on his knees on the open road, and worship the sagacious and admirable GAMMON, who had so exactly predicted what had come to pass.

CHAPTER VII.

WHILE the lofty door of a house in Grosvenor Street might be imagined yet quivering under the shock of a previously announced dinner-arrival, one of the servants who were standing behind a carriage which approached from the direction of Piccadilly slipped off, and in a twinkling, with a thun-thun-thunder-under-under, thunder-runder-runder, thun-thun-thun! and a shrill thrilling *whir-r-r* of the bell, announced the arrival of the Duke of —, the last guest. It was a large and plain carriage, but perfectly well known; and before the door of the house at which it had drawn up had been opened, displaying some four or five servants standing in the hall, in simple but elegant liveries, half-a-dozen passengers had stopped to see get out of the carriage an elderly, middle-sized man, with a somewhat spare figure, dressed in plain black clothes, with iron-grey hair, and a countenance which, once seen, was not to be forgotten. That was a great man; one, the like of whom many previous centuries had not seen; whose name shot terror into the hearts of all the enemies of old England all over the world, and fond pride and admiration into the hearts of his fellow-countrymen.

"A quarter to eleven!" he said, in a quiet tone, to the servant who was holding open the carriage-door—while the bystanders took off their hats; a courtesy which he acknowledged, as he slowly stepped across the pavement, by touching his hat in a mechanical sort of way with his forefinger. The house-door then closed upon him; the handful of onlookers passed away; off rolled the empty carriage, and all without was quiet as before. The house was that of Mr. Aubrey, one of the members for the borough of Yatton, in Yorkshire—a man of rapidly rising importance in Parliament. Surely his was a pleasant position—that of an independent country gentleman, a member of one of the most ancient noble families in England, with a clear unincumbered rent-roll of

ten-thousand a-year, and already, in only his thirty-fourth year, the spokesman of his class, and promising to become one of the ablest debaters in the House! Parliament having been assembled, in consequence of a particular emergency, at a much earlier period than usual, the House of Commons, in which Mr. Aubrey had the evening before delivered a well-timed and powerful speech, had adjourned for the Christmas recess, the House of Lords being about to follow its example that evening: an important division, however, being first expected to take place at a late hour. Mr. Aubrey was warmly complimented on his success by several of the select and brilliant circle then assembled; and who were all in high spirits—on account of a considerable triumph just obtained by their party, and to which Mr. Aubrey was assured, by even the Duke of —, his exertions had certainly not a little contributed. While his Grace was energetically intimating to Mr. Aubrey his opinion to this effect, there were two lovely women listening to him with intense eagerness—they were the wife and sister of Mr. Aubrey. The former was an elegant and interesting woman—with raven hair, and a complexion of dazzling fairness—of nearly eight-and-twenty; the latter was a really beautiful girl, somewhere between twenty and twenty-one. Both were dressed with the utmost simplicity and elegance. Mrs. Aubrey, most doatingly fond of her husband, and a blooming young mother of two as charming children as were to be met with in a day's walk all over both the parks, was, in character and manners, all pliancy and gentleness; while about Miss Aubrey there was a dash of spirit that gave an infinite zest to her beauty. Her blue eyes beamed with the richest expression of feeling—in short, Catharine Aubrey was, both in face and figure, a downright English beauty; and she knew—truth must be told—that such she appeared to the Great Duke, whose cold aquiline eye she often *felt* to be settled upon her with satisfaction. The fact was, that he had penetrated at a first glance beneath the mere surface of an arch, sweet, and winning manner, and detected a certain strength of character in Miss Aubrey which gave him more than usual interest in her, and spread over his iron-cast features a pleasant expression, relaxing their sternness. But I must not forget that there are others in the room; and amongst them, standing at a little distance, is Lord De la Zouch, one of Mr. Aubrey's neighbours in Yorkshire. Apparently he is listening to a brother peer talking to him very earnestly about the expected division; but Lord De la Zouch's eye is fixed on you, lovely Kate—and how little can you imagine what is passing through his mind? It has just occurred to him that his sudden arrangement for young Delamere—his only son and heir, come up the day before from Oxford—to call for him about half-past ten, and take his place in Mrs. Aubrey's drawing-room, while he Lord De la Zouch, goes down to the House—may be attended with certain consequences. He is speculating on the effect of your beauty bursting suddenly on his son—who has not seen you for nearly two years; all this gives him *anxiety*—but not painful anxiety—for, dear Kate, he knows that your forehead would wear the ancient coronet of the De la Zouches with grace and dignity. But Delamere is as yet too young—and if he gets the image of Catharine Aubrey into his head, it will, fears his father, instantly cast into the shade and displace all the stern visages of those old poets, orators, historians, philosophers, and statesmen, who ought, in Lord De la Zouch and his son's tutor's judgment, to occupy exclusively the head of the aforesaid Delamere for some five years to come. That youngster—happy fellow!—frank, high-spirited, and enthusiastic—and handsome to boot—was heir to an ancient title and great estates; all that his father had considered in looking out for an alliance was—youth, health, beauty, blood—here they all were;—and *fortune* too—bah! what did it signify to his son—but at any rate, 'twas not to be thought of for some years.

"Suppose," said he aloud, though in a musing manner, "one were to say—

twenty-four——” “*Twenty-four!*” echoed his companion with amazement; “my dear De La Zouch, what the deuce do you mean? *Eighty-four* at the very lowest?” “Eh? what? oh—yes, of course—I should say ninety—I mean—hem!—*they* will muster about twenty-four only.” “Ah—I beg your pardon!—*there* you’re right, I daresay.”

Here the announcement of dinner put an end to the colloquy of the two statesmen. Lord De la Zouch led down Miss Aubrey with an air of the most delicate and cordial courtesy; and felt almost disposed, in the heat of the moment, to tell her that he had arranged all in his own mind—that if *she* willed it, she had *his* hearty consent to become the future Lady De la Zouch. He was himself the eleventh who had come to the title in direct descent from father to son; ’twas a point he was not a little nervous and anxious about—he detested collateral succession—and he made himself infinitely agreeable to Miss Aubrey as he sat beside her at dinner! The Duke of——sat on the right hand side of Mrs. Aubrey, seemingly in high spirits, and she appeared proud enough of her supporter. It was a delightful dinner-party, elegant without ostentation, and select without pretence of exclusiveness. As there was nothing peculiar in the dinner, and as I have no turn for describing such matters in detail—the clatter of plate, the jingling of silver, the sparkling of wines, and so forth—I shall request the reader to imagine himself led by me quietly out of the dining-room into the library. ’Tis a spacious room, all the sides covered with books, of which Mr. Aubrey is a great collector—and the clear red fire is shedding a subdued ruddy light on all the objects in the room, very favourable for our purpose. The ample table is covered with books and papers; and there is an antique-looking arm-chair drawn opposite to the fire, in which Mr. Aubrey has been indulging in a long reverie till the moment of quitting it to go and dress for dinner. This chair I shall sit in myself; you may draw out from the recess for yourself, one of two little sloping easy-chairs, which have been placed there by Mrs. and Miss Aubrey for their own sole use, considering that they are excellent judges of the period at which Mr. Aubrey has been long enough alone, and at which they should come in and gossip with him. We may as well draw the dusky green curtains across the window, through which the moon shines at present rather too brightly.—So, now, after coaxing up the fire, I will proceed to tell you a little bit of pleasant family history.

The Aubreys are a Yorkshire family—the younger branch of the ancient and noble family of the Dreddlingtons. Their residence, Yatton, is in the north-eastern part of the county, not above fifteen or twenty miles from the sea. The hall is one of those old structures, the sight of which throws you back at least a couple of centuries in our English history. It stands in a park, crowded with trees, many of them of great age and size, and under which some two hundred head of deer perform their capricious and graceful gambols. In approaching from London, you strike off the great north road into a broad bye-way; after going down which for about a mile, you come to a straggling little village called Yatton, at the further extremity of which stands a little aged grey church, with a tall thin spire; an immense yew-tree, with a kind of friendly gloom, over-shadowing, in the little churchyard, nearly half the graves. Rather in the rear of the church is the vicarage-house, snug and sheltered by a line of fir-trees. After walking on about eighty yards, you come to the high park-gates, and see a lodge just within, on the left-hand side, sheltered by an elm-tree. You then wind your way for about two-thirds of a mile along a gravel walk, amongst the thickening trees, till you come to a ponderous old crumbling-looking red brick gateway of the time of Henry VII., with one or two deeply-set stone windows in the turrets, and mouldering stone-capped battlements peeping through high-climbing ivy. There is an old escutcheon immediately over the point of the arch; and as you pass underneath, if you look up you can see the groove of the

old portcullis still remaining. Having passed under this castellated remnant, you enter a kind of court, formed by a high wall completely covered with ivy, running along in a line from the right-hand turret of the gateway till it joins the house. Along its course are a number of yew-trees. In the centre of the open space is a quaintly disposed grass-plot, dotted about with stunted box, and in the centre of that stands a weatherbeaten stone sundial. The house itself is a large irregular pile of dull red brickwork, with great stacks of chimneys in the rear. The body of the building has evidently been erected at different times. Some part is evidently in the style of Queen Elizabeth's reign, another in that of Queen Anne: and it is plain that on the site of the present structure has formerly stood a castle. There are, indeed, traces of the old moat still visible round the rear of the house. One of the ancient towers, with small deep stone windows, still remains, giving its venerable support to the right-hand extremity of the building, as you stand with your face to the door. The long frontage of the house consists of two huge masses of dusky-red brickwork (you can hardly call them *wings*), connected together by a lower building in the centre, which contains the hall. There are three or four rows of long thin deep windows, with heavy-looking wooden sashes. The high-pitched roof is of slate, and has deep projecting eaves, forming, in fact, a bold cornice running along the whole length of the building, which is two or three stories high. At the left extremity stands a clump of ancient cedars of Lebanon, feathering in evergreen beauty down to the ground. The hall is large and lofty; the floor is of polished oak, almost the whole of which is covered with thick matting; it is wainscoted all round with black oak; some seven or eight full-length pictures, evidently of considerable antiquity, being let into the panels. Quaint figures these are, to be sure; and if they resembled the ancestors of the Aubrey family, those ancestors must have been singular and startling persons! The faces are quite white and staring—all as if in wonder; and they have such long thin legs! ending in sharp-pointed shoes. On each side of the ample fireplace stands a figure in full armour; and there are also ranged along the wall old helmets, cuirasses, swords, lances, battle-axes, and cross-bows, the very idea of wearing, wielding, and handling which makes your arms ache, while you exclaim, "They *must* have been giants in those days!" On one side of this hall, a door opens into the dining-room, beyond which is the library; on the other side a door leads you into a noble room, now called the drawing-room, where stands a very fine organ. Out of both the dining-room and drawing-room you pass up a staircase contained in an old square tower; two sides of each of them, opening on the old quadrangle, lead into a gallery running all round it, and into which all the bed-rooms open.

But I need not go into further detail. Altogether it is truly a fine old mansion. Its only constant occupant is Mrs. Aubrey, the mother of Mr. Aubrey, in whose library we are now seated. She is a widow, having survived her husband, who twice was one of the county members, about fifteen years. Mr. Aubrey is her first-born child, Miss Aubrey her last; four intervening children she has followed to the grave—the grief and suffering consequent upon which have sadly shaken her constitution, and made her, both in actual health and in appearance, at least ten years older than she really is—for she has, in point of fact, not long since entered her sixtieth year. What a blessed life she leads at Yatton! Her serene and cheerful temper makes every one happy about her: and her charity is unbounded, but dispensed with a most just discrimination. One way or another, almost a fourth of the village are direct pensioners upon her bounty. You have only to mention the name of Madam Aubrey, the lady of Yatton, to witness involuntary homage paid to her virtues. Her word is law; and well indeed it may be. While Mr. Aubrey, her husband, was to the last somewhat stern in his temper and reserved in his habits, bearing

withal a spotless and lofty character, *she* was always what she still is, meek, gentle, accessible, charitable, and pious. On his death she withdrew from the world, and has ever since resided at Yatton—never having quitted it for a single day. There are in the vicinity one or two stately families, with ancient name, sounding title, and great possessions ; but for ten miles round Yatton, old Madam Aubrey, the squire's mother, is the name that is enshrined in people's kindest and most grateful feelings, and receives their readiest homage. 'Tis perhaps a very small matter to mention, but there is at the hall a great white old mare, Peggy, that for these twenty years, in all weathers, hath been the bearer of Madam's bounty. A thousand times hath she carried Jacob Jones (now a pensioned servant, whose hair is as white as Peggy's) all over the estate, and also oft beyond it, with comfortable matters for the sick and poor. Most commonly there are a couple of stone bottles filled with cowslip, currant, ginger, or elderberry wine, slung before old Jones over the well-worn saddle—to the carrying of which Peggy has got so accustomed, that she does not go comfortably without them. She has so fallen into the habits of old Jones, who is an inveterate gossip (Madam having helped to make him such by the numerous inquiries she makes of him every morning as to every one in the village and on the estate, and which inquiries he must have the means of answering), that slow as she jogs along, if ever she meets or is overtaken by any one, she stops of her own accord, as if to hear what they and her rider have to say to one another. She is a great favourite with all, and gets a mouthful of hay or grass at every place she stops at, either from the children or the old people. When old Peggy comes to die, she will be missed by all the folk round Yatton.

Madam Aubrey, growing, I am sorry to say, very feeble, cannot go about as much as she used, and betakes herself oftener and oftener to the old family coach ; and when she is going to drive about the neighbourhood, you may almost always see it stop at the vicarage for old Dr. Tatham, who generally accompanies her. On these occasions she always has a bag containing Testaments and Prayer-books, which are principally distributed as rewards to those whom the parson can recommend as deserving of them. For these five-and-twenty years she has never missed giving a copy of each to every child in the village and on the estate, on its being confirmed ; and the old lady looks round very keenly every Sunday from her pew, to see that these Bibles and Prayer-books are reverently used. I could go on for an hour and longer, telling you these and other such matters of this exemplary lady ; but we shall by and by have some opportunity of seeing and knowing more of her personally. Her features are delicate, and have been very handsome ; and in manner she is very calm, and quiet, and dignified. She looks all that you could expect from what I have told you. The briskness of youth, the sedate firmness of middle-age, have years since given place, as you will see with some pain, to the feebleness produced by ill health and mental suffering—for she mourned after her children with all a fond and bereaved mother's love. Oh ! how she doats upon her surviving son and daughter ! And are they not worthy of such a mother ?

Mr. Aubrey is in his thirty-fourth year ; and inherits the mental qualities of both his parents—the demeanour and person of his father. He has a reserve that is not cynical, but only diffident ; yet it gives him, at least at first sight, and till you have become familiar with his features, which are of a cast at once refined and aristocratic, yet full of goodness, an air of hauteur, which is very—very far from his real nature. He has in truth the soft heart and benignant temper of his mother, joined with the masculine firmness of character which belonged to his father ; which, however, is in danger of being seriously impaired by *inaction*. Sensitive he is, perhaps to a fault. There is a tone of melancholy or pensiveness in his composition, which has probably increased upon him from

his severe studies, ever since his youth. He is a man of superior intellect, and is a capital scholar. At Oxford he plucked the prize of Double First from a host of strong competitors, and has since justified the expectations which were entertained of him. He has made several really valuable contributions to historic literature—indeed, I think he is even now engaged upon some researches calculated to throw much light upon the obscure origin of several of our political institutions. He has entered upon *politics* with uncommon—perhaps with an excessive—ardour. I think he is likely to make an eminent figure in Parliament; for he is a man of very clear head, very patient, of business-like habits, ready in debate, and, moreover, has a very impressive delivery as a public speaker. He is generous and charitable as his admirable mother, and careless, even to a fault, of his pecuniary interests. He is a man of perfect simplicity and purity of character. Above all, his virtues are the virtues which have been sublimed by Christianity—as it were, the cold embers of morality warmed into religion. He stands happily equidistant from infidelity and fanaticism. He has looked for light from above, and has heard a voice saying, “*This is the way, walk thou in it.*” His piety is the real source of that happy consistent dignity, and content, and firmness, which have earned him the respect of all who know him, and will bear him through whatever may befall him. He who standeth upon this rock cannot be moved, perhaps not even touched, by the surges of worldly reverses—of difficulties and distress. In manner Mr. Aubrey is calm and gentleman-like; in person he is rather above the middle height, and of slight make. From the way in which his clothes hang about him, a certain sharpness at his shoulders catching the eye of an observer—you would feel an anxiety about his health, which would be increased by hearing of the mortality in his family; and your thoughts are perhaps pointed in the same direction, by a glance at his long, thin, delicate white hands. His countenance has a serene manliness about it when in repose, and great acuteness and vivacity when animated. His hair, not very full, is black as jet, and his forehead ample and marked.

Mr. Aubrey has been married about six years; ’twas a case of love at first sight. Chance threw him in the way of Agnes St. Clair, within a few weeks after she had been bereaved of her only parent, Colonel St. Clair, a man of old but impoverished family, who fell in the Peninsular war. Had he lived only a month or two longer, he would have succeeded to a considerable estate; as it was, he left his only child comparatively penniless; but Heaven had endowed her with personal beauty, with a lovely disposition, and superior understanding. It was not till after a long and anxious wooing, backed by the cordial entreaties of Mrs. Aubrey, that Miss St. Clair consented to become the wife of a man, who, to this hour, loves her with all the passionate ardour with which she had first inspired him. And richly she deserves his love, for she does, indeed, doat upon him; she studies, or rather, anticipates his every wish; in short, had the whole sex been searched for one calculated to make happy the morbidly fastidious Aubrey, the choice must surely have fallen on Miss St. Clair; a woman whose temper, whose tastes, and whose manners were at once in delicate and harmonizing unison and contrast with his own. She has hitherto brought him but two children—and those very beautiful children, too—a boy between four and five years old, and a girl about two years old. If I were to hint my own impressions I should say there was a probability—but be that as it may, ’tis an affair we have nothing to do with at present.

Of Catharine Aubrey you had a momentary moonlight glimpse, at a former period of this history; and you have seen her this evening under other, and perhaps not less interesting, circumstances. Now, where have you beheld a more exquisite specimen of budding womanhood?—but I feel that I shall get extravagant if I begin to dwell upon her charms. You have seen her—judge

for yourself ; but you do not *know* her as I do ; and I shall tell you that her personal beauty is but a faint emblem of the beauties of her mind and character. She is Aubrey's youngest—now his only sister ; and he cherishes her with the tenderest and fondest regard. Neither he, nor his mother—with both of whom she spends her time alternately—can bear to part with her for ever so short an interval. She is the gay, romping playmate of the little Aubreys ; the demure secretary and treasurer of her mother. I say *demure*, for there is a sly humour and archness in Kate's composition, which flickers about even her gravest moods. She is calculated equally for the seclusion of Yatton and the splendid atmosphere of Almack's ; but for the latter she seems at present to have little inclination. Kate is a girl of decided character, of strong sense, of high principles ; all of which are irradiated, not overborne, by her sparkling vivacity of temperament. She has real talent ; and her mind has been trained, and her tastes directed, with affectionate skill and vigilance by her gifted brother. She has many accomplishments ; but the only one I shall choose here to name is—music. *She* was one to sing and play before a man of the most fatidious taste and genius ! I defy any man to hear the rich tones of Miss Aubrey's voice without feeling his heart moved. Music is with her a matter not of *art* but of *feeling*—of passionate feeling ; but hark !—hush !—surely—yes, that is Miss Aubrey's voice—yes, that is her clear and brilliant touch ; the ladies have ascended to the drawing-room, and we must presently follow them. How time has passed ! I had a great deal more to tell you about the family, but we must take some other opportunity.

Yes, it *is* Miss Aubrey, playing on the new and superb piano given by her brother last week to Mrs. Aubrey. Do you see with what a careless grace and ease she is giving a very sweet but difficult composition of Haydn ? The lady who is standing by her, to turn over her music, is the celebrated Countess of Lydsdale. She is still young and beautiful ; but beside Miss Aubrey she presents a somewhat painful contrast ! 'Tis all the difference between an artificial and a natural flower. Poor Lady Lydsdale ! you are not happy with all your fashion and splendour ; the glitter of your diamonds cannot compensate for the loss of the sparkling spirits of a younger day ; they pale their ineffectual fires beside the fresh and joyous spirit of Catharine Aubrey ! You sigh——

"Now, I'll sing you quite a new thing," said Miss Aubrey, starting up, and turning over her portfolio till she came to a sheet of paper, on which were some verses in her own handwriting : "The words were written by my brother, and I have found an old air that exactly suits them !" Here her fingers, wandering softly and lightly over the keys, gave forth a beautiful symphony in the minor ; after which, with a rich and soft voice, she sung the following :—

PEACE.

Where, O where
Hath gentle PEACE found rest ?
Builds she in bower of lady fair ?—
But LOVE—he hath possession there ;
Not long is *she* the guest.

Sits she crown'd
Beneath a pictured dome ?
But there AMBITION keeps his ground,
And Fear and Envy skulk around ;
This cannot be her home !

Will she hide
In scholar's pensive cell ?
But *he* already hath his bride :
Him MELANCHOLY sits beside—
With her she may not dwell

Now and then,
 Peace, wandering, lays her head
 On regal couch, in captive's den—
 But nowhere finds she rest with men,
 Or only with the dead!

To these words, trembling on the beautiful lips of Miss Aubrey, was listening an unperceived auditor, with eyes devouring her every feature, and ears absorbing every tone of her thrilling voice. It was young Delamere, who had, only a moment or two before Miss Aubrey had commenced singing the above lines, alighted from his father's carriage, which was then waiting at the door to carry off Lord De la Zouch to the House of Lords. Arrested by the rich voice of the singer, he stopped short before he had entered the drawing-room in which she sat, and, stepping to a corner where he was hid from view, though he could distinctly see Miss Aubrey, there he remained as if rooted to the spot. He, too, had a soul for music; and the exquisite manner in which Miss Aubrey gave the last verse, called up before his excited fancy the vivid image of a dove fluttering with agitated uncertainty over the sea of human life, even like the dove over the waters enveloping the earth in olden time. The mournful minor into which she threw the last line, excited a heart susceptible of the liveliest emotions to a degree which it required some effort to control, and almost a tear to relieve. When Miss Aubrey had quitted the piano, Mrs. Aubrey followed and gave a very delicious sonata from Haydn. Then sat down Lady Lydsdale, and dashed off, in an exceedingly brilliant style, a *scena* from the new opera, which quickly reduced the excited feelings of Delamere to a pitch admitting of his presenting himself. While this lowering process was going on, Delamere took down a little volume from a tasteful little cabinet of books immediately behind him, and which proved to be a volume of the *Faery Queen*. He found many pencil-marks, evidently made by a light female hand; and turning to the fly-leaf, beheld, in a small elegant handwriting, the name of "*Catharine Aubrey*." His heart fluttered; he turned towards the piano, and beheld the graceful figure of Miss Aubrey standing beside Lady Lydsdale, in an attitude of delighted earnestness—for her ladyship was undoubtedly a very brilliant performer—totally unconscious of the admiring eye that was fixed upon her. After gazing at her for some moments, he gently pressed the autograph to his lips; and solemnly vowed within himself, in the most deliberate manner possible, that if he could not marry Catharine Aubrey, he would never marry anybody; he would, moreover, quit England for ever; and deposit a broken heart in a foreign grave—and so forth.

Thus calmly resolved—or rather to such a resolution did his thoughts tend—that sedate person, the Honourable Geoffry Lovel Delamere. He was a high-spirited, frank-hearted fellow; and, like a good-natured fool, whom bitter knowledge of the world has not cooled down into contempt for a very considerable portion of it, trusted and loved almost every one whom he saw. At that moment there was only one person in the whole world that he hated, viz., the miserable individual—if any such there were—who might have happened to forestall him in the affections of Miss Aubrey. The bare idea made his breath come and go quickly, and his cheek flush. Why, he felt that he had a sort of *right* to Miss Aubrey's heart; for had they not been born, and had they not lived almost all their lives, within a few miles of each other? Had they not often played together?—were not their family estates almost contiguous?—Delamere advanced into the room assuming as unconcerned an air as he could; but he felt not a little tried when Miss Aubrey, on seeing him, gaily and frankly extended her hand to him, supposing him to have only the moment before entered the house. Poor Delamere's hand slightly quivered as he felt it clasping the soft billed fingers of her whom he had thus resolved to make his

wife; what would he not have given to have carried them to his lips? Now, if I were to say that in the course of that evening, Miss Aubrey did not form a kind—of a sort—of a faint—notion of the possible state of matters with young Delamere, I should not be treating the reader with that eminent degree of candour for which I think he, or she, is at present disposed to give me credit. But Kate was deeply skilled in human nature, and settled the matter by one very just reflection, viz., that Delamere was, in contemplation of law, a mere *infant*—i. e., he wanted yet several weeks of twenty-one! and, therefore, that it was not likely that, etc., etc., etc. And, besides—pooh!—pooh!—’tis a mere *boy*, at College—how ridiculous!—So she gave herself no trouble about the affair; exhibited no symptoms of caution or coyness, but conducted herself just as if he had not been present.

He was a handsome young fellow, too!

During the evening, Mr. Delamere took an opportunity of asking Miss Aubrey who wrote the verses which he pointed to, as they lay on the piano. The handwriting, she said, was hers, but the verses were composed by her brother. He asked for the copy, with a slight trepidation. She readily gave it to him—he receiving it with (as he supposed) a mighty unconcerned air. He read it over that night, before getting into bed, at least six times; and it was the very first thing he looked at on getting out of bed in the morning. He resolved to turn the verses into every kind of Greek and Latin metre he knew of—

In short, that here was a “course of true love” *opened*, seems pretty evident; but whether it will “run smooth” is another matter.

Their guests having at length departed, Mr. Aubrey, his wife and sister, soon afterwards rose to retire. He went, very sleepy, straight to his dressing-room; they to the nursery—(a constant and laudable custom with them)—to see how the children were going on, as far as they could learn from their drowsy attendants. Little Aubrey would have reminded you of one of the exquisite sketches of children’s heads by Reynolds or Lawrence, as he lay breathing imperceptibly, with his rich flowing hair spread upon the pillow, in which his face was partly hid, and his arms stretched out. Mrs. Aubrey put her finger into one of his hands, which was half open, and which closed as it were instinctively upon it with a gentle pressure. “Look, Kate,” softly whispered Mrs. Aubrey. Miss Aubrey leaned forward and kissed his little cheek with an ardour that almost awoke him. After a glance at a tiny head partly visible above the clothes, in an adjoining bed, and looking like a rose-bud almost entirely hid amongst the leaves, they withdrew.

“The little loves!—how one’s heart thrills with looking at them!” said Miss Aubrey, as they descended. “Kate!” whispered Mrs. Aubrey, with an arch smile, as they stood at their respective chamber doors, which adjoined, “Mr. Delamere is improved—is not he?—Ah, Kate! Kate!—I understand!”

“Agnes, how can you?”—hastily answered Miss Aubrey with cheeks suddenly crimsoned. “I never heard such nonsense.”

“Night, night, Kate! think over it!” said Mrs. Aubrey, and kissing her beautiful sister-in-law, the next moment the blooming wife had entered her bed-room. Miss Aubrey slipped into her dressing-room, where Harriet, her maid, was sitting asleep before the fire. Her lovely mistress did not for a few minutes awake her; but placing her candlestick on the toilet-table, stood in a musing attitude.

“It’s so perfectly *ridiculous*,” at length she said aloud, and up started her maid. Within a quarter of an hour Miss Aubrey was in bed, but by no means asleep.

The next morning, about eleven o’clock, Mr. Aubrey was seated in the library, in momentary expectation of his letters; and a few moments before the postman’s *rat-tat* was heard, Mrs. and Miss Aubrey made their appearance,

as was their wont, in expectation of anything that might have been upon the cover, in addition to the address—"Charles Aubrey, Esq., M.P.," etc., etc., etc., the words, letters, or figures, "Mrs. Aubrey," or "Miss Aubrey," in the corner. In addition to this, 'twas not an unpleasant thing to skim over the contents of *his* letters! as one by one he opened them, and laid them aside; for both these fair creatures were daughters of Eve, and inherited a *little* of her curiosity. Mr. Aubrey was always somewhat nervous and fidgety on such occasions, and wished them gone; but they only laughed at him, so he was fain to put up with them. On this morning there were more than Mr. Aubrey's usual number of letters; and in casting her eye over them, Mrs. Aubrey suddenly took up one that challenged attention; it bore a black seal, had a deep black bordering, and had the frank of Lord Alkmond, at whose house in Shropshire they had for months been engaged to spend the ensuing Christmas, and were intending to set off on their visit the very next day. The ominous missive was soon torn open; it was from Lord Alkmond himself, who in a few hurried lines announced the sudden death of his brother; so that there was an end of their visit to the Priory.

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, calmly, rising after a pause, and standing with his back to the fire, in a musing posture. "Has he left any family, Charles?" inquired Mrs. Aubrey, with a sigh, her eyes still fixed on the letter. "I—I really don't know—poor fellow! We lose a vote for Shellington—we shall, to a certainty," he added, with an air of chagrin visibly stealing over his features. "How politics harden the heart, Charles! Just at this moment to be ——" quoth Mrs. Aubrey. "It *is* too bad, Agnes, I own—but you see," said Mr. Aubrey, affectionately; but added suddenly, "stay, I don't know either, for there's the Grassingham interest come into the field since the last ——" "Charles, I do really almost think," exclaimed Mrs. Aubrey with sudden emotion, stepping to his side, and throwing her arms around him affectionately, "that if *I* were to die, I should be forgotten in a fortnight, if the House were sitting ——" "How *can* you say such things, my love!" inquired Aubrey, kissing her forehead.

"When Agnes was born, you know," she murmured inarticulately. Her husband folded her tenderly in his arms in silence. On the occasion she alluded to, he had nearly lost her; and they both had reason to expect that another similar season of peril was not *very* distant.

"Now, Charles, you *can't* escape," said Miss Aubrey, presently, assuming a cheerful tone; "now for dear old Yatton! ——" "Yes, Yatton! Positively you must!" added Mrs. Aubrey, smiling through her tears. "What! Go to Yatton?" said Mr. Aubrey, shaking his head and smiling. "Nonsense! Why, we must set off to-morrow: they've had no warning!" "What warning does mamma require, Charles?" inquired his sister eagerly. "Isn't the dear old place always in apple-pie order?" "How you love the 'dear old place,' Kate!" exclaimed Aubrey, in such an affectionate tone as brought his sister in an instant to his side, to urge on her suit; and there stood the lord of Yatton embraced by these two beautiful women, his own heart (*inter nos*) seconding every word they uttered.

"How my mother would stare!" said he at length, irresolutely, looking from one to the other, and smiling at their eagerness. "What a bustle everything will be in!" exclaimed Kate. "I fancy I'm there already! The great blazing fires—the holly and mistletoe. We must all go, Charles—children and all!" "Why, really, I hardly know——" "Oh! I've settled it all," quoth Kate, seeing that she had gained her point, and resolved to press her advantage; "and what's more, we've no time to lose; this is Tuesday—Christmas Day is Saturday—we must of course stop a night on the way; but hadn't we better have Griffiths in, to arrange all?" Aubrey rang the bell.

"Request Mr. Griffiths to come to me," said he to the servant who answered the summons.

Within a very few minutes that respectable functionary had made his appearance and received his instructions. The march to Shropshire was countermanded—and hey! for Yatton!—for which they were to start the next day about noon. Mr. Griffiths' first step was to pack off Sam, Mr. Aubrey's groom, by the Tally-ho, the first coach to York, starting at two o'clock that very day, with letters announcing the immediate arrival of the family. These orders were received by Sam (who had been born and bred at Yatton), whilst he was bestowing, with vehement sibillation, his customary civilities on a favourite mare of his master's. Down dropped the currycomb; he jumped into the air; snapped his fingers; then he threw his arms round Jenny, and tickled her under the chin. "Dang it," said he, as he threw her another feed of oats, "I wish thee were going wi' me—dang'd if I don't." Then he hastily made himself "a *bit* tidy;" presented himself very respectfully before Mr. Griffiths, to receive the wherewithal to pay his fare; and having obtained it, off he scampered to the Bull and Mouth, as if it had been a neck-and-neck race between him and all London, which should get down to Yorkshire first. A little after one o'clock his packet of letters was delivered to him; and within another hour Sam was to be seen (quite comfortable, with a draught of spiced ale given him by the cook, to make his hasty dinner "sit well") on the top of the Tally-ho, rattling rapidly along the great north road.

"Come, Kate," said Mrs. Aubrey, entering Miss Aubrey's room, where she was giving directions to her maid, "I've ordered the carriage to be at the door as soon as it can be got ready; we must go off to Coutts'—see!" She held in her hand two slips of paper, one of which she gave Miss Aubrey. 'Twas a cheque for one hundred pounds—her brother's usual Christmas-box—"and then we've a quantity of little matters to buy this afternoon. Come, Kate, quick! quick!"

Now, poor Kate had spent nearly all her money, which circumstance, connected with another that I shall shortly mention, had given her not a little concern. At her earnest request, her brother had, about a year before, built her a nice little school, capable of containing some eighteen or twenty girls, upon a slip of land between the vicarage and the park wall of Yatton, and old Mrs. Aubrey and her daughter found a resident schoolmistress, and, in fact, supported the little establishment, which, at the time I am speaking of, contained some seventeen or eighteen of the villagers' younger children. Miss Aubrey took a prodigious interest in this little school, scarce a day passing without her visiting it when she was at Yatton; and what Kate wanted was the luxury of giving a Christmas present to both mistress and scholars. That, however, she would have had some difficulty in effecting but for this her brother's timely present, which had quite set her heart at ease. On their return, the carriage was quite crowded with the things they had been purchasing—articles of clothing for the feeble old villagers; work-boxes, samplers, books, testaments, prayer-books, etc., etc., etc., for the school; the sight of which, I can assure the reader, made Kate far happier than if they had been the costliest articles of dress and jewellery.

The next day was a very pleasant one for travelling—"frosty, but kindly." About one o'clock there might have been seen standing before the door the roomy yellow family carriage, with four post-horses, all in travelling trim. In the rumble sat Mr. Aubrey's valet and Mrs. Aubrey's maid—Miss Aubrey's, and one of the nursery-maids, going down by the coach which had carried Sam—the Tally-ho. The coach-box was piled up with that sort of luggage which, by its lightness and bulk, denotes lady-travelling: inside were Mrs. and Miss Aubrey, muffled in furs, shawls and pelisses; a nursery-maid, with little

Master and Miss Aubrey, equally well protected from the cold; and the vacant seat awaited Mr. Aubrey, who at length made his appearance, having been engaged till the latest moment in giving and repeating specific instructions concerning the forwarding of his letters and papers. As soon as he had taken his place, and all had been snugly disposed within, the steps were doubled up, the door was closed, the windows were drawn up—crack! crack! went the whips of the two postilions, and away rolled the carriage over the dry hard pavement.

On drawing up to the posting-house, which was within about forty miles of Yatton, the Aubreys found a carriage and four just ready to start, after changing horses; and whose should this prove to be but Lord De la Zouch's, containing himself, his lady, and his son, Mr. Delamere. His lordship and his son both alighted on accidentally discovering who had overtaken them, and coming up to Mr. Aubrey's carriage windows, exchanged surprised and cordial greetings with its occupants—whom Lord De la Zouch imagined to have been by this time on their way to Shropshire. Mr. Delamere manifested a surprising eagerness about the welfare of little Agnes Aubrey, who happened to be lying fast asleep in Miss Aubrey's lap; but the evening was fast advancing, and both the travelling parties had yet before them a considerable portion of their journey. After a hasty promise on the part of each to dine with the other before returning to town for the season—a promise which *Mr. Delamere* at all events resolved should not be lost sight of—they parted. 'Twas eight o'clock before Mr. Aubrey's eye, which had been for some time on the look-out, caught sight of Yatton woods, and when it did his heart yearned towards them. The moon shone brightly and cheerily, and it was pleasant to listen to the quickening clattering tramp of the horses upon the dry, hard highway, as the travellers rapidly neared a spot endeared to them by every early and tender association. When they had got within half a mile of the village, they overtook the worthy vicar, who had mounted his nag, and been out on the road to meet the expected comers, for an hour before. Aubrey roused Mrs. Aubrey from her nap, to point out Dr. Tatham, who at that time was cantering along beside the open window. 'Twas refreshing to see the cheerful old man—who looked as ruddy and hearty as ever.

"God bless you all! All well?" he exclaimed, riding close to the window. "Yes; but how is my mother?" inquired Aubrey. "High spirits—high spirits! Was with her this afternoon! Have not seen her better for years! So surprised! Ah! here's an old friend—Hector!" "Bow-wow-wow-wow! Bow!—Bow-wow!"

"Papa! papa!" exclaimed the voice of little Charles, struggling to get on his father's lap to look out of the window, "that is Hector! I know it is! He is come to see *me*! I want to look at him!"

Mr. Aubrey lifted him up as he desired, and a huge black-and-white Newfoundland dog almost leaped up to the window at sight of him clapping his little hands, as if in eager recognition, and then scampered and bounded about in all directions, barking most boisterously, to the infinite delight of little Aubrey. This messenger had been sent on by Sam, the groom, who had been on the look-out for the travellers for some time; and the moment he caught sight of the carriage, pelted down the village, through the park, at top speed, up to the Hall, there to communicate the good news of their safe arrival. The travellers thought that the village had never looked so pretty and picturesque before. The sound of the carriage dashing through it called all the cottagers to their doors, where they stood bowing and curtsying. It soon reached the park gates, which were thrown wide open in readiness for its entrance. As they passed the church, they heard its little bells ringing a merry peal to welcome their arrival; its faint chimes went to their very hearts.

"My darling Agnes, here we are again in the old place," said Mr. Aubrey in a joyous tone, affectionately kissing Mrs. Aubrey and his sister, as, after having wound their way up the park at almost a gallop, they heard themselves rattling over the stone pavement immediately under the old turreted gateway. On approaching it, they saw lights glancing about in the Hall windows; and before they had drawn up, the great door was thrown open, and several servants (one or two of them grey-headed) made their appearance, eager to release the travellers from their long confinement. A great wood fire was crackling and blazing in the ample fire-place in the hall opposite the door, casting a right pleasant and cheerful light over the various antique objects ranged around the walls; but the object on which Mr. Aubrey's eye instantly settled was the venerable figure of his mother, standing beside the fire-place with one or two female attendants. The moment that the carriage-door was opened, he stepped quickly out (nearly tumbling, by the way, over Hector, who appeared to think that the carriage-door had been opened only to enable him to jump into it, which he prepared to do).

"God bless you, madam!" said he tenderly, as he received his mother's fervent but silent greeting, and imagined that the arms folded round him were somewhat feebler than when he had last felt them embracing him. With similar affection was the good old lady received by her daughter and daughter-in-law.

"Where is my pony, grandmamma?" quoth little Aubrey, running up to her (he had been kept quiet for the last eighty miles or so, by the mention of the aforesaid pony, which had been sent to the Hall as a present to him some weeks before). "Where is it? I want to see my little pony directly! Mamma says you have got a little pony for me with a long tail; I *must* see it before I go to bed; I must, indeed—is it in the stable?"

"You shall see it in the morning, my darling—the very first thing," said Mrs. Aubrey, fervently kissing her beautiful little grandson, while tears of joy and pride ran down her cheek. She then pressed her lips on the delicate but flushed cheek of little Agnes, who was fast asleep; and as soon as they had been conducted towards their nursery, Mrs. Aubrey, followed by her children, led the way to the dining-room—the dear delightful old dining-room, in which all of them had passed so many happy hours of their lives. It was large and lofty; and two antique branch silver candlesticks, standing on sconces upon each side of a strange old straggling carved mantelpiece of inlaid oak, aided by the blaze given out by two immense logs of wood burning beneath, thoroughly illuminated it. The walls were oak-panelled, containing many pictures, several of them of great value; and the floor also was of polished oak, over the centre of which, however, was spread a thick richly-coloured Turkey carpet. Opposite the door was a large mullioned bay-window, then, however, concealed behind an ample flowing crimson curtain. On the further side of the fire-place stood a high-backed and roomy arm-chair, almost covered with Kate's embroidery, and in which Mrs. Aubrey had evidently, as usual, been sitting till the moment of their arrival—for on a small ebony table beside it lay her spectacles, and an open volume. Nearly fronting the fire-place was a recess, in which stood an exquisitely carved black ebony cabinet, inlaid with white and red ivory. This Miss Aubrey claimed as her own, and had appropriated it to her own purposes ever since she was seven years old. "You dear old thing!" said she, throwing open the folding-doors—"Everything just as I left it! Really, dear mamma, I could skip about the room for joy! I wish Charles would never leave Yatton again!"

"It's rather lonely, my love, when *none* of you are with me," said Mrs. Aubrey. "I feel getting older——" "Dearest mamma," interrupted Miss Aubrey quickly. "I won't leave you again! I'm quite tired of town—I am, indeed!"

Though fires were lit in their several dressing-rooms, of which they were more than once reminded by their respective attendants, they all remained seated before the fire in carriage costume (except that Kate had thrown aside her bonnet, her half-uncurled tresses hanging in negligent profusion over her thickly-furred pelisse), eagerly conversing about the little incidents of their journey, and the events which had transpired at Yatton since they had quitted it. At length, however, they retired to perform the refreshing duties of the dressing-room, before sitting down to supper. Of that comfortable meal, within twenty minutes' time or so, they partook with hearty relish. What mortal, however delicate, could resist the fare set before them—the plump capon, the delicious grilled ham, the poached eggs, the floury potatoes, home-baked bread, white and brown—custards, mince-pies, home-brewed ale, as soft as milk, as clear as amber—mulled claret—and so forth? The travellers had evidently never relished anything more, to the infinite delight of old Mrs. Aubrey; who observing, soon afterwards, irrepressible symptoms of fatigue and drowsiness, ordered them all off to bed—Kate sleeping in the same chamber in which she sat when the reader was permitted to catch a moonlight glimpse of her, as already more than once referred to.

They did not make their appearance the next morning till after nine o'clock, Mrs. Aubrey having read prayers before the assembled servants, as usual, nearly an hour before—a duty her son always performed when at the Hall, but on this occasion he had overslept himself. He found his mother in the breakfast-room, where she was soon joined by her daughter and daughter-in-law, all of them being in high health and spirits. Just as they were finishing breakfast, little Aubrey burst into the room in a perfect ecstasy—for old Jones had taken him round to the stables, and shown him the little pony which had been bought for him only a few months before. He had heard it neigh—had seen its long tail—had patted its neck—had seen it eat—and now his vehement prayer was, that his papa, and mamma, and Kate would immediately go and see it, and take his little sister also.

Breakfast over, they separated. Old Mrs. Aubrey went to her own room to be attended by her housekeeper; the other two ladies retired to their rooms—Kate principally engaged in arranging her presents for her little scholars: and Mr. Aubrey repaired to his library—as delightful an old snuggerly as the most studious recluse could desire—where he was presently attended by his bailiff. He found that everything was going on as he could have wished. With one or two exceptions, his rents were paid most punctually; the farms and land kept in capital condition. To be sure an incorrigible old poacher had been giving his people a little trouble, as usual, and was committed for trial at the Spring Assizes; a few trivial trespasses had been committed in search of firewood, and other small matters; which, after having been detailed with great minuteness by his zealous and vigilant bailiff, were dispatched by Mr. Aubrey with a “pooh, pooh!”—Then there was Gregory, who held the smallest farm on the estate, at its southern extremity—he was three quarters' rent in arrear—but he had a sick wife and seven children—so he was at once forgiven all that was due, and also what would become due on the ensuing quarter day.—“In fact,” said Mr. Aubrey, “don't ask him for any more rent. I'm sure the poor fellow will pay when he's able.”

Some rents were to be raised; others lowered; and some half-dozen of the poorer cottages were to be forthwith put into good repair, at Mr. Aubrey's expense. The two oxen had been sent, on the preceding afternoon, from the home farm to the butcher's, to be distributed on Christmas Eve among the poorer villagers, according to orders brought down from town, by Sam, the day before. Thus was Mr. Aubrey engaged for an hour or two, till luncheon time, when good Dr. Tatham made his welcome appearance, having

been engaged most of the morning in touching up an old Christmas sermon

He had been vicar of Yatton for nearly thirty years, having been presented to it by the late Mr. Aubrey, with whom he had been intimate at college. He was a delightful specimen of a country parson. Cheerful, unaffected, and good-natured, there was a dash of quaintness or roughness about his manners, that reminded you of the crust in very fine old port. He had been a widower, and childless, for fifteen years. His parish had been ever since his family, whom he still watched over with an affectionate vigilance. He was respected and beloved by all. Almost every man, woman, and child that had died in Yatton, during nearly thirty years, had departed with the sound of his kind and solemn voice in their ears. He claimed a sort of personal acquaintance with almost all the gravestones in his little churchyard; and when he looked at them, his conscience bore him witness, that he had done his duty by the dust that slept underneath. He was at the bedside of a sick person almost as soon, and as often, as the doctor—no matter what sort of weather, or at what hour of the day or night. Methinks I see him now, bustling about the village, with healthy, ruddy cheek, a clear, cheerful eye, hair white as snow; with a small, stout figure, clothed in a suit of somewhat rusty black (knee-breeches and gaiters all round the year), and with a small shovel-hat. No one lives in the Vicarage with him but an elderly woman, his housekeeper, and her husband, whose chief business is to look after the doctor's old mare and the little garden; in which I have often seen him and his master, with his coat off, digging for hours together. He rises at five in the winter, and four in the summer, being occupied till breakfast with his studies; for he was an excellent scholar, and has not forgotten, in the zealous discharge of his sacred duties, the pursuits of literature and philosophy, in which he gained no inconsiderable distinction in his youth. He derives a very moderate income from his living; but it is even more than sufficient for his necessities. Ever since Mr. Aubrey's devotion to politics has carried him away from Yatton for a considerable portion of each year, Dr. Tatham has been the right-hand counsellor of old Mrs. Aubrey, in all her pious and charitable plans and purposes. Every New Year's Day, there comes from the Hall to the Vicarage six dozen of fine old port wine—a present from Mrs. Aubrey; but the little doctor (though he never tells her so) scarce drinks six bottles of them in a year. Two dozen of them go, within a few days' time, to a poor brother parson in an adjoining parish, who, with his wife and three children—all in feeble health—can hardly keep body and soul together, and who, but for this generous brother, would not probably taste a glass of wine throughout the year, except on certain occasions, when the very humblest may moisten their poor lips with wine—I mean the Sacrament—the sublime and solemn festival given by One who doth not forget the poor and destitute, however in their misery they may sometimes think to the contrary!—The remainder of his little present Dr. Tatham distributes in small quantities amongst such of his parishioners as may require it, and may not happen to have come under the immediate notice of Mrs. Aubrey. Dr. Tatham has known Mr. Aubrey ever since he was about five years old. 'Twas the doctor that first taught him Greek and Latin; and, up to his going to college, gave him the frequent advantage of his learned experience.

While Miss Aubrey, accompanied by her sister-in-law, and followed by a servant carrying a great bag, filled with articles brought from London the day before, went to the school which I have before mentioned, in order to distribute her prizes and presents, Mr. Aubrey and Dr. Tatham set off on a walk through the village. "I must really do something for that old steeple of yours, Doctor," said Aubrey, as arm in arm they approached the church; it looks crumbling away in many parts." "If you'd only send a couple of masons

to repair the *porch*, and make it weather-tight, it would satisfy me for some years to come," said the Doctor. "Well—we'll look at it," replied Aubrey; and, turning aside, they entered the little churchyard.

"How I love this old yew-tree!" he exclaimed, as they passed under it; "it casts a kind of tender gloom around that always makes me pensive, not to say melancholy!" A sigh escaped him, as his eye glanced at the family vault, which was almost in the centre of the shade, where lay his father, three brothers, and a sister, and where, in the course of nature, a few short years would see the precious remains of his mother deposited. But the Doctor, who had hastened forward alone for a moment, finding the church door open, called out to Mr. Aubrey, who soon stood within the porch. It certainly required a little repairing, which Mr. Aubrey said should be looked to immediately. "See—we're all preparing for to-morrow," said Dr. Tatham, leading the way into the little church, where the grizzle-headed clerk was busy decorating the pulpit, reading-desk, and altar-piece, with the cheerful emblems of the season.

"I never see these," said the Doctor, taking up one of the sprigs of mistletoe lying on a form beside them, "but I think of your own Christmas verses, Mr. Aubrey, when you were younger and fresher than you now are—don't you recollect them?" "Oh—pooh!" "But I remember them," rejoined the Doctor; and he began,—

"Hail! silvery, modest mistletoe,
Wreath'd round winter's brow of snow,
Clinging so chastely, tenderly:
Hail holly, darkly, richly green,
Whose crimson berries blush between
Thy prickly foliage, modestly.
Ye winter-flowers, bloom sweet and fair,
Though Nature's garden else be bare—
Ye vernal glistening emblems, meet
To twine a Christmas coronet!"

"That will do, Doctor," interrupted Aubrey smiling, "what a memory you have for trifles!"

"Peggy! Peggy!—you're sadly overdoing it," said the Doctor, calling out to the sexton's wife, who was busy at work in the Squire's pew—a large square pew in the nave, near the pulpit. "Why, do you want to hide the Squire's family from the congregation? You're quite putting a holly hedge all round!"

"Please you, sir," quoth Peggy, "I've got so much I don't know where to put it—so, in course, I put it here!"

"Then," said the Doctor, with a smile, looking round the church, "let John get up and stick some of it into those old hatchments; and," looking up at the clerk, busy at work in the pulpit, "don't you put quite so much up there in my candlesticks!"

With this the Parson and the Squire took their departure. As they passed slowly up the village, which already wore a sort of holiday aspect, they met on all hands with a cordial and respectful greeting. The quiet little public-house turned out some four or five stout steady fellows—all tenants of Mr. Aubrey's—with their pipes in their hands, and who took off their hats, and bowed very low. Mr. Aubrey went up and entered into conversation with them for some minutes—their families and farms, he found, were well and thriving. There was quite a little crowd of women about the shop of Nick Steele, the butcher, who, with an extra hand to help him, was giving out the second ox which had been sent from the Hall to the persons whose names had been given in to him from Mrs. Aubrey. Further on, some were cleaning their little windows, others sweeping their floors, and sprinkling sand over them; most were sticking holly and mistletoe in their windows, and over their mantel.

pieces. Everywhere, in short, was to be seen that air of quiet preparation for the solemnly cheerful morrow, which fills a thoughtful observer with feelings of pensive but exquisite satisfaction.

Mr. Aubrey returned home towards dusk, cheered and enlivened by his walk. His sudden plunge into the simplicity and comparative solitude of country life—and that country Yatton—had quite refreshed his feelings, and given a tone to his spirits. Of course Dr. Tatham was to dine at the Hall on the morrow; if he did not, indeed, it would have been for the first time during the last five-and-twenty years.

Christmas Eve passed pleasantly and quietly enough at the Hall. After dinner the merry little ones were introduced, and their prattle and romps occupied an hour right joyously. As soon as, smothered with kisses, they had been dismissed to bed, old Mrs. Aubrey composed herself in her great chair to her usual after-dinner's nap; while her son, his wife, and sister, sitting fronting the fire—a decanter or two, and a few wine-glasses and dessert, remaining on the table behind them—sat conversing in a subdued tone, now listening to the wind roaring in the chimney—a sound which not a little enhanced their sense of comfort—then criticising the disposition of the evergreens with which the room was plentifully decorated, and laying out their movements during the ensuing fortnight. Mrs. Aubrey and Kate were, with affectionate earnestness, contrasting to Aubrey the peaceful pleasures of a country life with the restless excitement and endless anxieties of a London political life, to which they saw him more and more addicting himself; he all the while playfully parrying their attacks, but secretly acknowledging the truth and force of what they said, when—hark!—a novel sound from without, which roused the old lady from her nap. What do you think, dear reader, it was? The voices of little girls singing what seemed to be a Christmas hymn: yes, they caught the words—

“Hark! the herald angels sing,
Glory to the new-born King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild”—

“Why, surely—it must be your little schoolgirls,” said old Mrs. Aubrey, looking at her daughter, and listening. “I do believe it is!” quoth Kate, her eyes suddenly filling with tears, as she sat eagerly inclining her ear towards the window.

“They must be standing on the grass-plot just before the window,” said Mr. Aubrey; the tiny voices were thrilling his very heart within him. His sensitive nature might be compared to a delicate Æolian harp, which gave forth, with the slightest breath of accident, or circumstance,—“The still, sad music of humanity.” In a few moments he was almost in tears—the sounds were so unlike the fierce and turbulent cries of political warfare to which his ears had been latterly accustomed! The more the poor children sang, the more was he affected. Kate's tears fell fast, for she had been in an excited mood before this little incident occurred. “Do you hear, mamma,” said she, “the voice of the poor little thing that was last taken into the school? The little darling!” Kate tried to smile away her emotion; but 'twas in vain. Mr. Aubrey gently drew aside the curtain, and pulled up the central blind—and there, headed by their matron, stood the little singers exposed to view, some eighteen in number, ranged in a row on the grass, their small white shawls glistening in the moonlight. The oldest seemed not more than ten or twelve years old, while the younger ones could not be more than five or six. They seemed all singing from their very hearts.

As soon as they had finished their hymn, they were conducted into the housekeeper's room, according to orders sent for that purpose from Mrs. Aubrey, and each of them received a little present of money, besides a full glass of Mrs.

Jackson's choicest raisin wine, and a currant bun; Kate slipping half-a-guinea into the hand of their mistress, to whose wish to afford gratification to the inmates of the Hall was entirely owing the little incident which had so pleased and surprised them.

"A happy Christmas to you, dear papa and mamma!" said little Aubrey, about eight o'clock the next morning, pushing aside the curtains, and trying to clamber up on the high bed where Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey were still asleep—soon, however, they were awoke by the welcome sound! The morning promised a beautiful day. The air, though cold, was clear; and the branches of the trees visible from their windows were all covered with hoar-frost, which seemed to line them as if with silver fringe. The little bells of Yatton church were ringing a merry peal; but how different in tone and strength from the clangour of the London church-bells!—Christmas was indeed at last arrived—and cheerful were the greetings of those who soon after met at the bountiful breakfast-table. Old Mrs. Aubrey was going to church with them—in fact, not even a domestic was to be left at home that could possibly be spared. By the time that the carriage, with the fat and lazy-looking grey horses, was at the Hall door, the sun had burst out in beauty from an almost cloudless sky. The three ladies rode alone; Aubrey preferring to walk, accompanied by his little son, as the ground was dry and hard, and the distance very short. A troop of some twelve or fourteen servants, male and female, presently followed; and then came Mr. Aubrey, leading along the heir of Yatton—a boy of whom he might well be proud, as the future possessor of his name, his fortune, and his honours. When he had reached the church, the carriage was returning home. Almost the whole congregation stood collected before the church door, to see the Squire's family enter; and reverent were the curtsies and bows with which old Mrs. Aubrey and her lovely companions were received. Very soon after they had taken their places, Mr. Aubrey and his son made their appearance; objects they were of the deepest interest, as they passed along to their pew. A few minutes afterwards little Dr. Tatham entered the church in his surplice (which he almost always put on at home), with a face, serious to be sure, but yet overspread with an expression even more bland and benignant than usual. He knew there was not a soul among the little crowd around him that did not really love him, and that did not know how heartily he returned their love. All eyes were of course on the Squire's pew. Mrs. Aubrey was looking well—her daughter and daughter-in-law were thought by all to be by far the most beautiful women in the world—what must people think of them in London? Mr. Aubrey looked, they thought, pleased and happy, but rather paler, and even a little thinner; and as for the little Squire, with his bright eyes, his rosy cheeks, his arch smile, his curling auburn hair—and so like his father and mother—he was the pride of Yatton!

Dr. Tatham read prayers, as he always did, with great distinctness and deliberation, so that everybody in the church, young and old, could catch every syllable; and he preached, considerably enough, a very short sermon—pithy, homely, and affectionate. He reminded them that he was then preaching his thirty-first Christmas Day sermon from that pulpit! The service and the sacrament over, none of the congregation moved from their places till the occupants of the Squire's pew had quitted it; but as soon as they had got outside of the door, the good people poured out after them, and almost lined the way from the church door to the gate at which the carriage stood, receiving and answering a hundred kind inquiries concerning themselves, their families, and their circumstances.

Mr. Aubrey stayed behind, desirous of taking another little ramble with Dr. Tatham through the village, for the day was indeed bright and beautiful, and the occasion inspiring. There was not a villager within four or five miles

of the Hall who did not sit down that day to a comfortable little relishing dinner, at least one-third of them being indebted for it directly to the bounty of the Aubreys. As soon as Dr. Tatham had taken off his gown, he accompanied Mr. Aubrey in cheerful mood, in the briskest spirits. 'Twas delightful to see the smoke come curling out of every chimney, scarce any one visible, suggesting to you that they were all housed, and preparing for or partaking of their roast-beef and plum-pudding! Now and then the bustling wife would show her heated red face at the door, and hastily curtsy as they passed, then returning to dish up her little dinner.

"Ah, ha; Mr. Aubrey!—isn't such a day as this worth a whole year in town?" exclaimed Dr. Tatham. "Both have their peculiar influences, Doctor; the pleasure of the contrast would be lost if ——" "Contrast! Believe me, in the language of Virgil ——"

"Ah! how goes on old blind Bess, Doctor?" interrupted Aubrey, as they approached the smallest cottage in the village—in fact the very last. "She's just the same as she has been these last twenty years. Shall we look in on the old creature?" "With all my heart. I hope, poor soul! that *she* has not been over-looked on this festive occasion." "Trust Mrs. Aubrey for that! I'll answer for it, we shall find old Bess as happy, in her way, as she can be."

This was a stone-blind old woman, who had been bedridden for the last twenty years. She had certainly passed her hundredth year—some said two or three years before—and had lived in her present little cottage for nearly half a century, having grown out of the recollection of almost all the inhabitants of the village. She had long been a pensioner of Mrs. Aubrey's, by whom alone, indeed, she was supported. Her great age, her singular appearance, and a certain rambling way of talking that she had, earned her the reputation in the village of being able to say strange things; and one or two of the old gossips knew of things coming to pass according to what—poor old soul!—she had predicted!

Dr. Tatham gently pushed open the door. This cottage consisted, in fact, of but one room, and that a very small one, and lit by only one little window. The floor was clean, and evidently just fresh sanded. On a wooden stool, opposite a fire-place, on which a small saucepan pot was placed, sat a girl about twelve years old (a daughter of the woman who lived nearest), crumbling some bread into a basin, with some broth in it. On a narrow bed against the wall, opposite the window, was to be seen the somewhat remarkable figure of the solitary old tenant of the cottage. She was sitting up, resting against the pillow, which was placed on end against the wall. She was evidently a very tall woman; and her long, brown, wrinkled, shrivelled face, with prominent cheek-bones and her bushy white eyebrows, betokened the possession, in earlier days of a most masculine expression of features. Her hair, white as snow, was gathered back from her forehead, under a spreading plain white cap; and her sightless eyes, wide open, stared forward with a startling and somewhat sinister expression. She was wrapped round in a clean white bed-gown; and her long thin arms lay straight before her on the outside of the bed-clothes. Her lips were moving, as if she were talking to herself.

"She's a strange-looking object indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, as he and Dr. Tatham stood watching her for a few moments in silence. "Dame! dame!" said the Doctor loudly, approaching her bedside, "how are you to-day? It's Christmas Day—I wish you a merry Christmas." "Ay, ay—merry, merry! More the merrier! I've seen a hundred and nine of them!" "You seem very happy, dame." "They won't give me my broth—my broth," said she peevishly. "It's coming, granny," called out the shrill voice of the girl sitting before the fire, quickening her motions,

"Here's the Squire come to see you, dame, and he wishes you a happy Christmas," said Dr. Tatham.

"What! the Squire? Alive yet? Ah, well-a-day! well-a-day!" said she, in a feeble, mournful tone, slowly rubbing together her long, skinny, wrinkled hands, on the backs of which the veins stood out like knotted whipcord. She repeated the last words several times, in a truly doleful tone, gently shaking her head.

"Granny's been very sad, sir, to-day, and cried two or three times," said the little girl, stirring about the hot broth.

"Poor Squire! doth he not look sad?" inquired the old woman.

"Why should I, dame? What have I to fear?" said Mr. Aubrey.

"Merry in the Hall! all, merry! merry! merry! But no one has heard it but old blind Bess. Where's the Squire?" she added, suddenly turning her face full towards where they were standing—and it seemed whitened with emotion. Her staring eyes were settled on Mr. Aubrey's face, as if she were reading his very soul.

"Here I am, dame," said he, with a great deal of curiosity, to say the least of it. "Give me your hand, Squire," said she, stretching out her left arm, and working about her talon-like fingers, as if in eagerness to grasp Mr. Aubrey's hand, which he gave her. "Never fear! never, never! Happy in the Hall! I see all! How long ——"

"Why dame, this is truly a very pleasant greeting of yours," interposed Dr. Tatham with a smile. "Short and bitter! long and sweet! Put your trust in God, Squire." "I hope I do, granny," replied Mr. Aubrey seriously. "I see! I hear!—my broth! my broth!—where is it?" "Here it is, granny," said the girl. "Good-day, dame," said Mr. Aubrey, gently disengaging his hand from hers; and before they had left the cottage she began to swallow very greedily the broth with which the little girl fed her.

"This is the sort of way in which this old superannuated creature has frightened one or two of ——"

"Is it indeed?" inquired Mr. Aubrey, with a sort of mechanical smile. Dr. Tatham saw that he was in a somewhat serious humour.

"She's alarmed *you*, I protest!—I protest she has!" exclaimed the Doctor, with a smile as they walked along. Now, he knew the disposition and character of Aubrey intimately, and was well aware of a certain tendency he had to superstition.

"My dear Doctor, I assure you that you are mistaken—I am indeed not *alarmed*—but at the same time I will tell you something not a little singular. Would you believe that a month or two ago, when in town, I dreamed that I heard some one uttering something very much like the words which this old woman has just been uttering?"

"Ah! ha, ha!" laughed the Doctor; and, after a second or two's pause, Aubrey, as if ashamed of what he had said, echoed the laugh, and their conversation passed on to political topics, which kept them engaged for the remainder of their walk, Mr. Aubrey quitting his companion at the door of the Vicarage, to be rejoined by him at five o'clock, the dinner hour at the Hall. As Mr. Aubrey walked along the park, the shades of evening casting a deepening gloom around him, his thoughts involuntarily recurred to the cottage of old blind Bess, and he felt vague apprehensions flitting with darkening shade across his mind. Though he was hardly weak enough to attach any definite meaning or importance to the gibberish he had heard, it still had left an unpleasant *impression*, and he was vexed at feeling a wish that the incident—trifling as he was willing to believe it—should not be mentioned by Dr. Tatham at the Hall; and still more, on recollecting that he had *purposely abstained* from requesting the good Doctor not to do so. All this implied that the matter

had occupied his thoughts to a greater extent than he secretly relished. On reaching, however, the Hall door, this brief pressure on his feelings quickly ceased; for on entering he saw Mrs. Aubrey, his sister, and his two children, at high romps together in the hall, and he heartily joined in them.

CHAPTER VIII.

By five o'clock the little party were seated at the cheerful dinner-table, covered with the glittering old family plate, and that kind of fare at once substantial and luxurious, which befitted the occasion. Old Mrs. Aubrey, in her simple white turban and black velvet dress, presided with a kind of dignified cheerfulness which was delightful to see. Kate had contrived to make herself look more lovely even than usual, wearing a dress of dark blue satin, tastefully trimmed with blonde, and which exquisitely comported with her beautiful complexion. Oh that Delamere had been sitting opposite to, or beside her! The more matured proportions of her blooming sister-in-law appeared to infinite advantage in a rich green velvet dress, while a superb diamond glistened with subdued lustre in her beautiful bosom. She wore no ornaments in her dark hair, which was, as indeed might be said of Kate, "when unadorned adorned the most." The grey-headed old butler, as brisk as his choicest champagne, with which he perpetually bustled round the table, and the two steady-looking old family servants, going about their business with quiet celerity—the delicious air of antique elegance around them,—this was a Christmas dinner after one's own heart! Oh, the merry and dear old Yatton! And as if there were not loveliness enough already in the room, behold the door suddenly pushed open as soon as the dessert is on the table, and run up to his gay and laughing mother, her little son, his ample snowy collar resting gracefully on his crimson velvet dress. 'Tis her hope and pride—her first-born—the little Squire; but where is his sister?—where is Agnes? 'Tis even as Charles says—she fell asleep in the very act of being dressed, and they were obliged to put her to bed; so Charles is alone in his glory. You may well fold your delicate white arm around him, mamma!

His little gold cup is nearly filled to join in the first toast: are you all ready? The worthy Doctor has poured Mrs. Aubrey's glass and Kate's glass full up to the brim:—"Our next Christmas!"

Yes, your next Christmas! The vigilant eye of Dr. Tatham alone perceived a faint change of colour in Mr. Aubrey's cheek as the words were uttered; and his eye wandered for an instant, as if tracing across the room the image of old blind Bess; but 'twas gone in a moment; Aubrey was soon in much higher spirits than usual. Well he might be. How could man be placed in happier circumstances than he was? As soon as the ladies had withdrawn, together with little Aubrey, the Doctor and Mr. Aubrey drew their chairs before the fire, and enjoyed a long hour's pleasant chat on matters domestic and political. As to the latter, the Parson and the Squire were stout Tories; and a speech which Aubrey had lately delivered in the House, on the Catholic claims, had raised him to a pitch of eminence in the parson's estimation, where he had very few men in the country to keep him company. The Doctor here got on very fast indeed; and was just assuring the Squire that he saw dark days in store for old England from the machinations of the Papists; and that, for his part, he should rejoice to "seal his testimony with his blood," and would go to the stake not only without flinching, but rejoicing—(all which I verily believe *he* verily believed he would have done)—and coveting the crown of martyrdom, when Aubrey caught the sounds of his sister playing on the organ, a noble

instrument, which a year or two before, at her urgent request, he had purchased and placed in the drawing-room, whither he and the Doctor at once repaired. 'Twas a spacious and lofty room, well calculated for the splendid instrument which occupied the large recess fronting the door. Miss Aubrey was playing Handel, and with an exquisite perception of his matchless power and beauty Hark ! did you ever hear the grand yet simple recitative she is now commencing ?

"In the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, Saying—Where is He that is born King of the Jews ? for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him."

The Doctor officiated as chaplain that evening. The room was almost filled with servants, many of whose looks very plainly showed the merry doings that had been going on in the servants' hall ; some of them could scarce keep their eyes open ; one or two sat winking at each other, and so forth. Under the circumstances, therefore, the Doctor, with much judgment, read very short prayers, and immediately afterwards took his departure for his snug little vicarage.

The next morning, which proved as fine as the preceding, Mr. Aubrey was detained indoors with his letters, and one or two other little matters of business in his library, till luncheon time. "What say you, Kate, to a ride round the estate ?" said he, on taking his seat. Miss Aubrey was delighted ; and forth-with the horses were ordered to be got ready as soon as possible.

"You must not mind a little rough riding, Kate," said Aubrey ; "for we've got to go over some ugly places. I'm going to meet Waters at the end of the avenue, about that old sycamore—we must have it down at last." "Oh no, Charles, no ; I thought we had settled that last year," replied Kate, earnestly. "Pho ! if it had not been for you, Kate, it would have been down two years ago at least. Its hour is come at last, 'tis indeed, so no pouting ! It is injuring the other trees ; and, besides, it spoils the prospect from the back of the house." "Tis only Waters that puts these things into your head, Charles, and I shall let him know *my* opinion on the subject when I see him ! Mamma, haven't *you* a word to say for the old——"

But Mr. Aubrey, not deeming it discreet to await the new force which was being brought against him, started off to go round and see a newly-purchased horse, just brought to the stables.

Kate, who really became everything, looked charming in her blue riding-habit, sitting on her horse with infinite ease and grace—a capital horsewoman. The exercise soon brought a rich bloom upon her cheek ; and as she cantered along the road by the side of her brother, no one that met them but must have been struck with her beauty. Just as they had dropped into an easy walk—— "Charles," said she, observing two horsemen approaching them, "who can these be ? Heavens ! did you ever see such figures ? And how they ride !" "Why, certainly," replied her brother smiling, "they look a brace of undoubted Cockneys ! what can they be doing in these parts ?" "Dear me, what puppies !" exclaimed Miss Aubrey, lowering her voice as she neared the persons she spoke of.

"They are certainly a most extraordinary couple ! Who *can* they be ?" said Mr. Aubrey, a smile forcing itself into his features. One of the two was dressed in a light blue surtout, with the tip of a white pocket-handkerchief seen peeping out of a pocket in the front of it. His hat, with scarce any brim to it, was stuck aslant on the top of a bushy head of queer-coloured hair. His shirt-collars were turned down completely over his stock, displaying a great quantity of dirt-coloured hair under his chin ; while a pair of moustaches, of the same colour, were sprouting upon his upper lip. A quizzing-glass was stuck in his

right eye, and in his hand he carried a whip with a shining silver head. The other was almost equally distinguished by the elegance of his appearance. He had a glossy hat, a purple-coloured velvet waistcoat, two pins connected by little chains in his stock, a bottle-green surtout, sky-blue trousers. In short, who should these be but our old friends Messrs. Titmouse and Snap? Whoever they might be, it was plain that they were perfect novices on horseback, and their horses had every appearance of having been much fretted and worried by their riders. To the surprise of Mr. Aubrey and his sister, these two personages attempted to rein in, as they neared, with the evident intention of speaking to them.

"Pray—a—sir, will you, sir, tell us," commenced Titmouse, with a desperate attempt to appear at his ease, as he tried to make his horse stand still for a moment—"isn't there a place called—called"—here his horse, whose sides were constantly being galled by the spurs of its unconscious rider, began to back a little, then to go on one side, and, in Titmouse's fright, his glass dropped from his eye, and he seized hold of the pummel. Nevertheless, to show the lady how completely he was at his ease all the while, he levelled a great many oaths and curses at the unfortunate eyes and soul of his wayward brute; who, however, not in the least moved by them, but infinitely disliking the spurs of its rider and the twisting round of its mouth by the reins, seemed more and more inclined for mischief, and backed close up to the edge of the ditch.

"I'm afraid, sir," said Mr. Aubrey kindly, "you are not much accustomed to riding. Will you permit *me*—"

"Oh, yes—ye—ye—s, sir, I am uncommon—whee-o-uy! whuoy!"—(then a fresh volley of oaths). "Oh, dear, 'pon my soul—ho!—what—what *is* he going to do! Snap! Snap!"—'Twas, however, quite in vain to call on that gentleman for assistance; for he had grown as pale as death, on finding that his own brute seemed strongly disposed to follow the infernal example of the other, and was particularly inclined to rear up on its hind-legs. The very first motion of the sort brought Snap's heart (not large enough, perhaps, to choke him) into his mouth. Titmouse's beast suddenly inclined the contrary way; and throwing its hind feet into the air, sent its terrified rider flying, head over heels, into the very middle of the hedge, from which he dropped into the wet ditch. Both Mr. Aubrey and his groom dismounted, and secured the horse, who, having got rid of its ridiculous rider, stood quietly enough. Titmouse proved to be more frightened than hurt. His hat was crushed flat on his head, and half the left side of his face covered with mud—as, indeed, were his clothes all the way down. The groom (almost splitting with laughter) helped him on again; and as Mr. and Miss Aubrey were setting off—"I think, sir," said the former politely, "you were inquiring for some place?" "Yes, sir," quoth Snap. "Isn't there a place called Ya—Yat—Yat—(be quiet, you brute!)—Yatton about here?" "Yes, sir—straight on," replied Mr. Aubrey. Miss Aubrey hastily threw her veil over her face, to conceal her laughter, spurred her horse, and she and her brother were soon out of sight of the strangers.

"I say, Snap," quoth Titmouse, when he had in a measure cleansed himself, and they had both got a little composed, "see that lovely gal?" "Fine girl—devilish fine!" replied Snap. "I'm blessed if I don't think—'pon my life, I believe we've met before!" "Didn't seem to know you though!—" "Ah! I don't know—how uncommon infernal unfortunate to happen just at that moment when—" Titmouse became silent; for all of a sudden he recollected when and where, and under what circumstances, he had seen Miss Aubrey before, and which his vanity would not allow of his telling Snap. The fact was, that she had once accompanied her sister-in-law to Messrs. Tag-rag and Company's, to purchase some small matter of mercery. Titmouse had helped her, and his absurdity of manner had provoked a smile, which Titmouse a little

misconstrued; for when, a Sunday or two afterwards, he met her in the Park, the little fool had the presumption to nod to her—she having not the slightest notion who he was—and of course not having, on the present occasion, the least recollection of him. The reader will remember that this little incident made a deep impression on the mind of Mr. Titmouse.

The coincidence was really not a little singular—but to return to Mr. Aubrey and his sister. After riding a mile or two further up the road, they leaped over a very low mound or fence, which formed the extreme boundary of that part of the estate, and having passed through a couple of fields, they entered the lower extremity of that fine avenue of elms, at the higher end of which stood Kate's favourite tree, and also Waters and his under-bailiff—who looked to her like a couple of executioners, only awaiting the fiat of her brother. The sun shone brightly on the doomed sycamore—"the axe was laid at its root." As they rode up the avenue, Kate begged very hard for mercy; but for once her brother seemed obdurate—the tree, he said, *must* come down—'twas all nonsense to think of having it standing any longer!

"Remember, Charles," said she, passionately, as they drew up, "how we've all of us romped and sported under it! Poor papa also——" "See, Kate, how rotten it is," said her brother; and riding close to it, with his whip he snapped off two or three of its feeble silvery-grey branches—"it's high time for it to come down." "It fills the ground all around with little branches, sir, whenever there's the least breath of wind," said Waters. "It won't hardly hold a crow's weight on the topmost branches, sir," said Dickons, the under-bailiff. "Had it any leaves last summer?" inquired Mr. Aubrey. "I don't think, sir," said Waters, "it had a hundred all over it!"

"Really, Kate, 'tis such a melancholy, unsightly object, when seen from any part of the Hall"—turning round on his horse to look at the rear of the Hall, which was at about eighty yards' distance. "It looks such an old withered thing amongst the fresh green trees around it—'tis quite a painful contrast." Kate had gently urged on her horse, while her brother was speaking, till she was close beside him. "Charles," said she in a low whisper, "does not it remind you a little of poor old mamma, with her grey hairs, among her children and grandchildren? *She* is not out of place amongst us—is she?" Her eyes filled with tears. So did her brother's.

"Dearest Kate," said he, with emotion, affectionately grasping her little hand, "you have triumphed! The old tree shall never be cut down in my time! Waters, let the tree stand; and if anything *is* to be done to it—let the greatest *care* be taken of it."

"If I were to speak my mind," said Waters, seeing the turn things were taking, "I should say, with our young lady, the old tree's quite a kind of ornament in this here situation, and (as one might say) it sets off the rest." [It was he who had been worrying Mr. Aubrey for these last three years to have it cut down.]

"Well," replied Mr. Aubrey, "however that may be, let me hear no more of cutting it down.—Ah! what does old Jolter want here?" said he, observing an old tenant of that name, almost bent double with age, hobbling towards them. He was wrapped up in a coarse thick blue coat; his hair was long and white; his eyes dim and glassy with age.

"I don't know, sir—I'll go and see," said Waters. "What's the matter, Jolter?" he inquired, stepping forward to meet him. "Nothing much, sir," replied the old man, taking off his hat, and bowing very low towards Mr. and Miss Aubrey. "Put your hat on, my old friend," said Mr. Aubrey, kindly. "I only come to bring you this bit of paper, sir, if you please," said the old man addressing Waters. "You said, awhile ago, as how I was always to bring you papers that were left with me; and this"—taking one out of his pocket—"was

left with me only about an hour ago. It's seemingly a lawyer's paper, and was left by an uncommon gay young chap. He asked me my name, and then he looked at the paper, and read it all over to me, but I couldn't make anything of it."

"What is it?" inquired Mr. Aubrey, as Waters cast his eye over a sheet of paper, partly printed and partly written. "Why, it seems the old story, sir—that slip of waste land, sir. Mr. Tomkins is at it again, sir."

"Well, if he chooses to spend his money in that way, I can't help it," said Mr. Aubrey with a smile. "Let me look at the paper." He did so. "Yes, it seems the same kind of thing as before. Well," handing it back, "send it to Mr. Parkinson, and tell him to look to it; and, at all events, take care that poor old Jolter comes to no trouble by the business. How's the old wife, Jacob?"

"She's dreadful bad with rheumatis, sir; but the stuff that Madam sends her does her a woundy deal of good, sir, in her inside."

"Well, we must try if we can't send you some more; and, harkee, if the goodwife doesn't get better soon, send us up word to the Hall, and we'll have the doctor call on her. Now, Kate, let us away homeward." And they were soon out of sight.

I do not intend to deal so unceremoniously or summarily as Mr. Aubrey did with the document which had been brought to his notice by Jolter, then handed over to Waters, and by him, according to orders, transmitted the next day to Mr. Parkinson, Mr. Aubrey's attorney. It was what is called a "Declaration in Ejectment;" touching which, in order to throw a ray or two of light upon a document which will make no small figure in this history, I shall try to give the reader a little information on the point; and hope that a little attention to what now follows, will be repaid in due time.

If *Jones* claims a *debt* or *goods*, or *damages* from *Smith*, one would think that, if he went to law, the action would be entitled "*Jones versus Smith*;" and so it is. But behold, if it be land which is claimed by *Jones* from *Smith*, the style and name of the cause stand thus:—"DOE, on the demise of *Jones*, *versus* ROE." Instead, therefore, of *Jones* and *Smith* fighting out the matter in their own proper names, they set up a couple of puppets (called "John Doe" and "Richard Roe"), who fall upon one another in a very quaint fashion, after the manner of Punch and Judy. John Doe pretends to be the real plaintiff, and Richard Roe the real defendant. John Doe says that the land which Richard Roe has is his (the said John Doe's), because *Jones* (the real plaintiff) gave him a lease of it; and *Jones* is then called "the lessor of the plaintiff." John Doe further says that one Richard Roe (who calls himself by the very significant and expressive name of a "*Casual Ejector*"), came and turned him out, and so John Doe brings his action against Richard Roe. 'Tis a fact, that whenever land is sought to be recovered in England, this anomalous and farcical proceeding must be adopted. It is the duty of the *real* plaintiff (*Jones*) to serve on the *real* defendant (*Smith*) a copy of the queer document which I shall proceed to lay before the reader; and also to append to it an affectionate note, intimating the serious consequences which will ensue upon inattention or contumacy. The "Declaration," then, which had been served upon old Jolter, was in the words, letters, and figures following—that is say:—

"IN THE KING'S BENCH.

"Michaelmas Term, —th Geo.—

"YORKSHIRE, to-wit.—Richard Roe was attached to answer John Doe of a plea wherefore the said Richard Roe, with force and arms, etc., entered into two messuages, two dwelling-houses, two cottages, two stables, two out-houses, two yards, two gardens, two orchards, twenty acres of land covered with water

twenty acres of arable land, twenty acres of pasture land, and twenty acres of other land, with the appurtenances, situated in the parish of *Yatton*, in the county of *Yorkshire*, which *Tittlebat Titmouse*, Esquire, had demised to the said *John Doe* for a term which is not yet expired, and ejected him from his said farm, and other wrongs to the said *John Doe* there did, to the great damage of the said *John Doe*, and against the peace of our Lord the King, etc.; and Thereupon the said *John Doe*, by *Oily Gammon*, his attorney, complains,—

“That whereas the said *Tittlebat Titmouse*, on the —th day of *August*, in the year of our Lord 18—, at the parish aforesaid, in the county aforesaid, had demised the same tenements, with the appurtenances, to the said *John Doe*, to have and to hold the same to the said *John Doe* and his assigns thenceforth, for and during and unto the full end and term of twenty years thence next ensuing, and fully to be completed and ended: By virtue of which said demise, the said *John Doe* entered into the said tenements, with the appurtenances, and became and was thereof possessed for the said term, so to him thereof granted as aforesaid. And the said *John Doe* being so thereof possessed, the said *Richard Roe* afterwards, to-wit, on the day and year aforesaid, at the parish aforesaid, in the county aforesaid, with force and arms, etc., entered into the said tenements, with the appurtenances, which the said *Tittlebat Titmouse* had demised to the said *John Doe* in manner and for the term aforesaid, which is not yet expired, and ejected the said *John Doe* from his said farm; and other wrongs to the said *John Doe* then and there did, to the great damage of the said *John Doe*, and against the peace of our said Lord the now King. Wherefore the said *John Doe* saith that he is injured, and hath sustained damage to the value of £50, and therefore he brings his suit, etc.

“SQUEAL, for the Plaintiff.

GROWL, for the Defendant.

{	Pledges of	{	<i>John Den.</i>
{	Prosecution.	{	<i>Richard Fenn.</i>

“MR. JACOB . OLTER,

“I am informed that you are in possession of, or claim title to, the premises in this Declaration of Ejectment mentioned, or to some part thereof: And I, being sued in this action as a *casual ejector* only, and having no claim or title to the same, do advise you to appear, next *Hilary Term*, in His Majesty's Court of Common Pleas at Westminster, by some attorney of that Court; and then and there by a rule to be made by the same Court to cause yourself to be made defendant in my stead; otherwise, I shall suffer judgment to be entered against me by default, and you will be turned out of possession.—
Your loving friend,

“RICHARD ROE.

“Dated this 8th day of December, 18—.”

You may regard the above document in the light of a deadly and destructive missile, thrown by an unperceived enemy into a peaceful citadel, attracting no particular notice from the innocent unsuspecting inhabitants—amongst whom, nevertheless, it presently explodes, and all is terror, death, and ruin.

Mr. Parkinson, Mr. Aubrey's solicitor, who resided at *Grilston*, the post-town nearest to *Yatton*, from which it was distant about six or seven miles, was sitting on the evening of Tuesday the 28th December, 18—, in his office, nearly finishing a letter to his London agents, Messrs. *Runnington and Company*—one of the most eminent firms in the profession—and which he was desirous of despatching by that night's mail.

The worthy writer was engaged with his letter, when *Waters* made his appearance, delivering to him the declaration in ejectment which had been

served upon old Jolter, and also the instructions concerning it which had been given by Mr. Aubrey. After Mr. Parkinson had asked particularly concerning Mr. Aubrey's health, and what had brought him so suddenly to Yatton, he cast his eye hastily over the "Declaration"—and at once came to the same conclusion concerning it which had been arrived at by Waters and Mr. Aubrey, viz., that it was another little arrow out of the quiver of the litigious Mr. Tomkins. As soon as Waters had left, Mr. Parkinson thus proceeded to conclude his letter:—

“*Doe dem. Titmouse v. Roe.*”

“I enclose you Declaration herein, served yesterday. No doubt it is the disputed slip of waste land adjoining the cottage of old Jacob Jolter, a tenant of Mr. Aubrey of Yatton, that is sought to be recovered. I am quite sick of this petty annoyance, as also is Mr. Aubrey, who is now down here. Please call on Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, of Saffron Hill, and settle the matter finally, on the best terms you can; it being Mr. Aubrey's wish that old Jolter (who is very feeble and timid) should suffer no inconvenience. I observe a new lessor of the plaintiff, with a very singular name. I suppose it is the name of some prior holder of the little property at present held by Mr. Tomkins. Hoping soon to hear from you (particularly about the marriage-settlement), I am, Dear Sirs (with all the compliments of the season), yours truly,

“JAMES PARKINSON.”

“P.S.—The oysters and codfish came to hand in excellent order, for which please accept my best thanks. I shall remit you in a day or two £100 on account.”

This letter, lying among some twenty or thirty similar ones on Mr. Runnington's table, on the morning of its arrival in town, was opened in its turn; and then, in like manner, with most of the others, handed over to the managing clerk, in order that he might inquire into and report upon the state of the various matters of business referred to. As to the last item in Mr. Parkinson's letter, there seemed no particular reason for hurrying: so two or three days had elapsed before Mr. Runnington, having some other little business to transact with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, bethought himself of looking at his Diary, to see if there was not something else that he had to do with them. Putting, therefore, the Declaration in *Doe d. Titmouse v. Roe* into his pocket, it was not long before he was at the office in Saffron Hill—and in the very room in it which had been the scene of several memorable interviews between Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse and Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. I shall not detail what transpired on that occasion between Mr. Runnington and Messrs. Quirk and Gammon, with whom he was closeted for nearly an hour. On quitting the office his cheek was flushed, and his manners somewhat excited. After walking a little way in a moody manner, and with slow step, he suddenly jumped into a hackney-coach, and within a quarter of an hour's time had secured an inside place in the Tally-ho coach, which started for York at two o'clock in the afternoon—much doubting within himself, the while, whether he ought not to have set off at once in a post-chaise and four. He then made one or two calls in the Temple; and hurrying home to the office, made hasty arrangements for his sudden journey into Yorkshire. He was a calm and experienced man—in fact, a first-rate man of business; and you may be assured that this rapid and decisive movement of his had been the result of some very startling disclosure made to him by Messrs. Quirk and Gammon.

Now, let us glide back to the delightful solitude which we reluctantly quitted so short a time ago.

Mr. Aubrey was a studious and ambitious man; and in acceding so readily to the wishes of his wife and sister, to spend the Christmas recess at Yatton, had been not a little influenced by one consideration, which he had not thought it worth while to mention—namely, that it would afford him an opportunity of addressing himself with effect to a very important complicated question, which was to be brought before the House shortly after its re-assembling, and of which he then knew scarcely anything at all. For this purpose he had a quantity of Parliamentary papers, etc., etc., etc., packed up and sent down by coach; and he quite gloated over the prospect of their being duly deposited upon his table, in the tranquil leisure of his library, at Yatton. But quietly as he supposed all this to have been managed, Mrs. Aubrey and Kate had a most accurate knowledge of his movements; and resolved within themselves (being therein comforted and assisted by old Mrs. Aubrey), that, as at their instances Mr. Aubrey had come down to Yatton, so they would take care that he should have not merely nominal, but real holidays. Unless he thought fit to rise at an early hour in the morning (which Mrs. Aubrey, junior, took upon herself to say *she* would take care should never be the case), it was decreed that he should not be allowed to waste more than two hours a-day in his library. 'Twas therefore in vain for him to sit at breakfast with eye aslant and thought-laden brow, as if meditating a long day's seclusion; somehow or another, he never got above an hour to himself. He was often momentarily petulant on these occasions, and soon saw through the designs of his enemies; but he so heartily and tenderly loved them that he soon surrendered at discretion, and, in fact, placed himself almost entirely at their mercy; resolving to make up for lost time on his return to town, and earnestly hoping that the interests of the nation would not suffer in the meanwhile! In short, the ladies of Yatton had agreed on their line of operations: that almost every night of their stay in the country should be devoted either to entertaining or visiting their neighbours; and, as a preparatory movement, that the days (weather permitting) should be occupied with exercise in the open air; in making "morning" calls on neighbours at several miles' distance from the Hall, and from each other; and from which they generally returned only in time enough to dress for dinner. As soon, indeed, as the *York True Blue* (the leading county paper) had announced the arrival at Yatton of "Charles Aubrey, Esq., M.P., and his family, for the Christmas recess," the efforts of Mrs. and Miss Aubrey were most powerfully seconded by a constant succession of visitors—by "troops of friends," as the lodge-keeper could have testified; for he and his buxom wife were continually opening and shutting the great gates. On the Monday after Christmas Day (*i.e.*, the day but one following), came cantering up to the Hall Lord De la Zouch and Mr. Delamere, of course staying to luncheon, and bearing a most pressing invitation from Lady De la Zouch, zealously backed by themselves, for the Aubreys to join a large party at Fotheringham Castle on New Year's Eve. This was accepted—a day and a night were thus gone at a swoop. The same thing happened with the Oldfields, their nearest neighbours; and Sir Percival Pickering at Luddington Court, where was a superb new picture-gallery to be critically inspected by Mr. Aubrey; the Earl of Oldacre, a college friend of Mr. Aubrey's—the venerable Lady Stratton, the earliest friend and school-fellow of old Mrs. Aubrey, and so forth. Then Kate had several visits to pay on her own account; and, being fond of horseback, she did not like riding about the country with only a groom in attendance on her; so her brother *must* accompany her on these occasions.

Then there was a little world of other matters to occupy Mr. Aubrey's attention, and which naturally crowded upon him, living so little at Yatton as he had latterly. He often had a kind of levee of his humbler neighbours, tenants

and constituents; and on these occasions his real goodness of nature, his simplicity, his patience, his forbearance, his sweetness of temper, his benevolence, shone conspicuous. With all these more endearing qualities, there was yet a placid dignity about him that chilled undue familiarity, and repelled presumption. On the occasions I have been alluding to, Mr. Aubrey was not only condescending and generous, but practically acute and discriminating: qualities of his, these latter, so well known, however, as to leave him at length scarce any opportunities of exercising them. His quiet but decisive interference put an end to a number of local unpleasantnesses and annoyances, and caused his increasing absence from Yatton to be very deeply regretted. Was a lad or a wench taking to idle and dissolute courses? A kind, or, as the occasion required, a stern expostulation of his—for he was a justice of the peace moreover—brought them to their senses. He had a very happy knack of reasoning and laughing quarrelsome neighbours into reconciliation and good-humour. He had a very keen eye after the practical details of agriculture; was equally quick at detecting an inconvenience, and appreciating—sometimes even suggesting—a remedy; and had, on several occasions, brought such knowledge to bear very effectively upon discussions in Parliament. His constituents, few in number undoubtedly, and humble, were quite satisfied with and proud of their member; and his unexpected appearance diffused among them real and general satisfaction. As a landlord he was beloved by his numerous tenantry; and well he might—for never was there so easy and liberal a landlord: he might at any time have increased his rental by £1,500 or £2,000 a-year, as his steward frequently intimated to him—but in vain. “Ten thousand a-year,” said Mr. Aubrey, “is far more than my necessities require—it affords me and my family every luxury that I can conceive of; and its magnitude reminds me constantly that hereafter I shall be called upon to give a very strict and solemn account of *my* stewardship.” I would I had time to complete, as it ought to be completed, this portraiture of a true Christian gentleman!

As he rode up to the Hare and Hounds Inn, at Grilston, one morning, to transact some little business, and also to look in on the Farmers’ Club, which was then holding one of its fortnightly meetings (all touching their hats and bowing to him on each side of the long street as he slowly passed up it), he perceived one of his horse’s feet limp a little. On dismounting, therefore, he stopped to see what was the matter, while his groom took up the foot to examine it.

“Dey-vilish fine horse!” exclaimed the voice of one standing close beside him, and in a tone of most disagreeable confidence. The exclamation was addressed to Mr. Aubrey; who on turning to the speaker, beheld a young man—’twas Titmouse—dressed in a style of the most extravagant absurdity. One hand was stuck into the hinder pocket of a stylish top-coat (the everlasting tip of a white pocket handkerchief glistening at the mouth of his breast-pocket), the other held a cigar to his mouth, from which, as he addressed Mr. Aubrey with an air of signal assurance, he slowly expelled the smoke that he had inhaled. Mr. Aubrey turned towards him with a cold and surprised air, without replying, at the same time wondering where he had seen the ridiculous object before.

“The horses in these parts arn’t to be compared with them at London—eh, sir?” quoth Titmouse, approaching closer to Mr. Aubrey and his groom, to see what the latter was doing—who on hearing Titmouse’s last sally, gave him a very significant look.

“I’m afraid the people here won’t relish your remarks, sir!” replied Mr. Aubrey, hardly able to forbear a smile, at the same time with an astonished air scanning the figure of his companion from head to foot,

"Who cares?" inquired Titmouse, with a very energetic oath. At this moment up came a farmer, who, observing Mr. Aubrey, made him a very low bow. Mr. Aubrey's attention being at the moment occupied with Titmouse, he did not observe the salutation; not so with Titmouse, who, conceiving it to have been directed to himself, acknowledged it by taking off his hat with great grace! Mr. Aubrey followed into the house, having ordered his groom to bring back the horse in an hour's time.

"Pray," said he mildly to the landlady, "who is that person smoking the cigar outside?"

"Why, sir," she replied, "he's a Mr. *Brown*; and has another with him here—who's going up to London by this afternoon's coach—this one stays behind a day or two longer. They're queer people, sir. Such dandies! Do nothing but smoke, and drink brandy and water, sir; only that t'other writes a good deal."

"Well, I wish you would remind him," said Mr. Aubrey, smiling, "that if he thinks fit to speak to *me* again, or in my presence, I am a magistrate, and have the power of fining him five shillings for every oath he utters."

"What! sir, has he been speaking to *you*? Well, I never—he's the most forward little upstart I ever seed!" said she, dropping her voice; and the sooner he takes himself off from here the better; for he's always winking at the maids and talking impudence to them. I've box his ears, I warrant him, one of these times!" Mr. Aubrey smiled, and went upstairs.

"There don't seem much wrong," quoth Titmouse to the groom, with a condescending air, as soon as Mr. Aubrey had entered the house. "Much you know about it, I don't guess!" quoth Sam, with a contemptuous smile. "Who's your master, fellow?" inquired Titmouse, knocking off the ashes from the tip of his cigar.

"A gentleman. What's *yours*?"

"Curse your impudence, you vagabond."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before Sam, with a slight tap of his hand, had knocked Titmouse's glossy hat off his head, and Titmouse's purple-hued hair stood exposed to view, provoking the jeers and laughter of one or two bystanders. Titmouse appeared about to strike the groom; who, hastily giving the bridles of his horses into the hands of an ostler, threw himself into boxing attitude; and, being a clean, tight-built, stout young fellow, looked a very formidable object, as he came squaring nearer and nearer to the dismayed Titmouse; and, on behalf of the outraged honour of all the horses of Yorkshire, was just going to let fly his *one-two*, when a sharp tapping at the bow window overhead startled him for a moment, interrupting his warlike demonstrations; and, on casting up his eyes, he beheld the threatening figure of his master, who was shaking his whip at him. He dropped his guard, touched his hat very humbly, and resumed his horses' bridles; muttering, however, to Titmouse, "If thou'rt a man, come down into t' yard, and I'll mak thee think a horse kicked thee, a liar, as thou art!"

"Who's that gentleman gone upstairs?" inquired Titmouse of the landlady, after he had sneaked into the inn.

"Squire Aubrey of Yatton," she replied tartly. Titmouse's face, previously very pale, flushed all over. "Ay, ay," she continued sharply—"thou *must* be chattering to the grand folks, and thou'st nearly put thy foot into 't at last, I can tell thee; for that's a magistrate, and thou'st been a-swearing afore him." Titmouse smiled rather faintly; and entering the parlour, affected to be engaged with a county newspaper; and he remained very quiet for upwards of an hour, not venturing out of the room till he had seen off Mr. Aubrey and his formidable Sam.

It was the hunting season; but Mr. Aubrey, though he had as fine horses

as were to be found in the county, and which were always at the service of his friends, partly from want of inclination, and partly from the delicacy of his constitution, never shared in the sports of the field. Now and then, however, he rode to cover, to see the hounds throw off, and exchange greetings with a great number of his friends and neighbours, on such occasions collected together. This he did the morning after that on which he had visited Grilston, accompanied at their earnest entreaty, by Mrs. Aubrey and Kate. I am not painting angels, but describing frail human nature; and truth forces me to say, that Kate knew pretty well that on such occasions she appeared to no little advantage. I protest I love her not the less for it—but is there a beautiful woman under the sun who is not aware of her charms, and of the effect they produce upon our sex? Pooh! I never will believe to the contrary. In Kate's composition this ingredient was but an imperceptible alloy in virgin gold. Now, how was it that she came to think of this hunting appointment? I do not exactly know; but I recollect that when Lord De la Zouch last called at Yatton, he happened to mention it at lunch, and to say that he and one Geoffrey Lovel Delamere—but, however that may be, behold, on a bright Thursday morning, Aubrey and his two lovely companions made their welcome appearance at the field, all superbly mounted, and most cordially greeted by all present. Miss Aubrey attracted universal admiration; but there was one handsome youngster, his well formed figure showing to great advantage in his new pink and leathers, that made a point of challenging her special notice, and in doing so, attracting that of all his envious fellow sportsmen; and that was Delamere. He seemed, indeed, infinitely more taken up with the little party from Yatton than with the serious business of the day. His horse, however, had an eye to business; and with erected ears, catching the first welcome signal sooner than its gallant rider, sprung off like light, and would have left its abstracted rider behind, had he not been a first-rate seat. In fact, Kate herself was not quite sufficiently on her guard; and her eager filly suddenly put in requisition all her rider's little strength and skill to rein her in—which having done, Kate's eye looked rather anxiously after her late companion, who, however, had already cleared the first hedge, and was fast making up to the scattering scarlet crowd. Oh, the bright exhilarating scene!

"Heigh ho!" said Kate, with a slight sigh, as soon as Delamere had disappeared—"I was very nearly off." "So was somebody else, Kate!" said Mrs. Aubrey, with a sly smile. "This is a very cool contrivance of yours, Kate,—bringing us here this morning," said her brother, rather gravely. "What *do* you mean, Charles?" she inquired, slightly reddening. He good-naturedly tapped her shoulder with his whip, laughed, urged his horse into a canter, and they were all soon on their way to General Grim's, an old friend of the late Mr. Aubrey's.

The party assembled on New Year's Eve at Fotheringham Castle, the magnificent residence of Lord De la Zouch, was numerous and brilliant. The Aubreys arrived about five o'clock; and on their emerging from their chambers into the drawing-room, about half-past six—Mr. Aubrey leading in his wife and sister—they attracted very general attention. He himself looked handsome, for the brisk country air had brought out a glow upon his too frequently sallow countenance—sallow with the unwholesome atmosphere, the late hours, the wasting excitement of the House of Commons; and his smile was cheerful, his eye bright and penetrating. There were several very fine women, married and single, in that splendid drawing-room; but there were two girls, in very different styles of beauty, who were soon allowed by all present to carry off the palm between them—I mean Miss Aubrey and Lady Caroline Caversham, the only daughter of the Marchioness of Redborough, both of whom were on a visit at the castle of some duration. Lady Caroline and Miss Aubrey were

of about the same age, and dressed almost exactly alike, viz., in white satin; only Lady Caroline wore a brilliant diamond necklace, whereas Kate had chosen to wear not a single ornament.

Lady Caroline was a trifle the taller, and had a very stately carriage. Her hair was black as jet—her features were refined and delicate; but they wore a very cold, haughty expression. After a glance at her half-closed eyes, and the swanlike curve of her snowy neck, you unconsciously withdrew from her, as from an inaccessible beauty. The more you looked at her, the more she satisfied your critical scrutiny; but your *feelings* went not out towards her—they were, in a manner, chilled and repulsed. Look, now, at our own Kate Aubrey—nay, never fear to place her beside yon supercilious divinity—look at her, and your *heart* acknowledges her loveliness; your soul thrills at sight of her bewitching blue eyes—eyes now sparkling with excitement, then languishing with softness, in accordance with the varying emotions of a sensitive nature—a most susceptible heart. Lady Caroline seems the exquisite but frigid production of a skilful statuary, who had caught a divinity in the very act of disdainfully setting her foot for the first time upon this poor earth of ours; but Kate is a living and breathing beauty—as it were, fresh from the hand of God himself!

Kate was very affectionately greeted by Lady De la Zouch, a lofty and dignified woman of about fifty; so also by Lord De la Zouch; but when young Delamere welcomed her with a palpable embarrassment of manner, a more brilliant colour stole into her cheek, and a keen observer might have noticed a little, rapid, undulating motion in her bosom, which told of some inward emotion. And a keen observer Kate at that moment had in her beautiful rival; from whose cheek, as that of Kate deepened in its roseate bloom, faded away the colour entirely, leaving it the hue of the lily. Her drooping eyelids could scarcely conceal the glances of alarm and anger which she darted at her plainly successful rival in the affections of the future Lord De la Zouch. Kate was quickly aware of this state of matters; and it required no little self-control to appear unaware of it. Delamere took her down to dinner, and seated himself beside her, and paid her such pointed attentions as at length really distressed her; and she was quite relieved when the time came for the ladies to withdraw. That she had not a secret yearning towards Delamere, the frequent companion of her early days, I cannot assert, because I know it would be contrary to the fact. Circumstances had kept him on the Continent for more than a year between the period of his quitting Eton and going to Oxford, where another twelvemonth had slipped away without his visiting Yorkshire: thus two years had elapsed—and behold Kate had become a woman, and he a man! Lord and Lady De la Zouch idolized their son, and were old and very firm friends of the Aubrey family; and, if Delamere really formed an attachment to one of Miss Aubrey's beauty, accomplishments, talent, amiability, and ancient family—why should he not be gratified? Kate, whether she would or not, was set down to the piano, Lady Caroline accompanying her on the harp—on which she usually performed with mingled skill and grace; but on the present occasion, both the fair performers found fault with their instruments—then with themselves—and presently gave up the attempt in despair. But when, at a later period of the evening, Kate's spirits had been a little exhilarated with dancing, and she sat down, at Lord De la Zouch's request, and gave that exquisite song from the *Tempest*,—"Where the bee sucks,"—all the witchery of her voice and manner had returned; and as for Delamere, he would have given the world to marry her that minute, and so for ever extinguish the hopes of—as he imagined—two or three nascent competitors for the beautiful prize then present.

That Kate was good as beautiful, the following little incident, which happened

to her on the ensuing evening, will show. There was a girl in the village at Yatton, about sixteen or seventeen years old, called Phoebe Williams; a very pretty girl, and who had spent about two years at the Hall as a laundry-maid, but had been obliged, some few months before the time I am speaking of, to return to her parents in the village, ill of a decline. She had been a sweet-tempered girl in her situation, and all her fellow-servants felt great interest in her, as also did Miss Aubrey. Mrs. Aubrey sent her dailies, jellies, sago, and other such matters, suitable for the poor girl's condition; and about a quarter-of-an-hour after her return from Fotheringham, Miss Aubrey, finding one of the female servants about to set off with some of the above-mentioned articles, and hearing that poor Phoebe was getting rapidly worse, instead of retiring to her room to undress, slipped on an additional shawl, and resolved to accompany the servant to the village. She said not a word to either her mother, her sister-in-law, or her brother; but simply left word with her maid where she was going, and that she should quickly return. It was snowing smartly when Kate set off: but she cared not, hurried on by the impulse of kindness, which led her to pay perhaps a last visit to the humble sufferer. She walked alongside of the elderly female servant, asking her a number of questions about Phoebe, and her sorrowing father and mother. It was nearly dark as they quitted the Park gates, and snowing, if anything, faster than when they had left the Hall. Kate, wrapping her shawl still closer round her slender figure, and her face pretty well protected by her veil, hurried on, and they soon reached Williams' cottage. Its humble tenants were, as may be imagined, not a little surprised at her appearance at such an hour, and in such inclement weather, and so apparently unattended. Poor Phoebe, worn to a shadow, was sitting opposite the fire, in a little wooden arm-chair, and propped up by a pillow. She trembled, and her lips moved on seeing Miss Aubrey, who sitting down on a stool beside her, after laying aside her snow-whitened shawl and bonnet, spoke to her in the most gentle and soothing strain imaginable. Phoebe's father and mother stood on each side of the little fireplace, gazing with tearful eyes upon their only child, soon about to depart from them for ever. The poor girl was indeed a touching object. She had been very pretty, but now her face was white and wofully emaciated—the dread impress of consumption was upon it. "You're very good, ma'am," she whispered, "to come to see me, and so late. They say it's a sad cold night." "I heard, Phoebe, that you were not so well, and I thought I would just step along with Margaret, who has brought you some more jelly. Did you like the last?" "Y-e-s, ma'am," she replied, hesitatingly; "but it's *very* hard for me to swallow anything now, my throat feels so sore." Here her mother shook her head and looked aside; for the doctor had only that morning explained to her the nature of the distressing symptom which her daughter was alluding to—as evidencing the very last stage of her fatal disorder. "I'm very sorry to hear you say so, Phoebe," replied Miss Aubrey. "Do you think there's anything else that Mrs. Jackson could make for you?" "No, ma'am, thank you; I feel it's no use trying to swallow anything more." "While there's life," said Kate, in a subdued, hesitating tone, "there's hope—they say." Phoebe shook her head mournfully. "Don't stop long, dear lady—it's getting very late for you to be out alone. Father will go——" "Never mind me, Phoebe—I can take care of myself. I hope you mind what good Dr. Tatham says to you? You know this sickness is from God, Phoebe. He knows what is best for His creatures."

"Thank God, ma'am, I think I feel resigned. I know it is God's will; but I am very sorry for poor father and mother—they'll be so lone like when they don't see Phoebe about." Her father gazed intently at her, and the tears ran trickling down his cheeks; her mother put her apron before her face, and

shook her head in silent anguish. Miss Aubrey did not speak for a few moments. "I see you have been reading the prayer-book mamma gave you when you were at the Hall," said she at length, observing the little volume lying open on Phœbe's lap.

"Yes, ma'am—I was *trying*; but somehow, lately, I can't read, for there's a kind of mist comes over my eyes, and I can't see." "That's weakness, Phœbe," said Miss Aubrey, quickly but tremulously. "May I make bold, ma'am," commenced Phœbe languidly, after a hesitating pause, "to ask *you* to read the little psalm I was trying to read a while ago? I should so like to hear *you*."

"I'll try, Phœbe," said Miss Aubrey, taking the book, which was open at the sixth psalm. 'Twas a severe trial, for her feelings were not a little excited already. But how could she refuse the dying girl? So she began, a little indistinctly, in a very low tone, and with frequent pauses; for the tears every now and then quite obscured her sight. She managed, however, to get as far as the sixth verse, which was thus: "*I am weary of my groaning: every night wash I my bed, and water my couch with tears: my beauty is gone for very trouble.*"

Here Kate's voice suddenly stopped. She buried her face for a moment or two in her handkerchief, and said hastily, "I can't read any more, Phœbe!" Every one in the little room was in tears, except poor Phœbe, who seemed past that.

"It's time for me to go, now, Phœbe. We'll send some one early in the morning to know how you are," said Miss Aubrey, rising and putting on her bonnet and shawl. She contrived to beckon Phœbe's mother to the back of the room, and silently slipped a couple of guineas into her hands; for she knew the mournful occasion there would soon be for such assistance! She then left, peremptorily declining the attendance of Phœbe's father—saying that it *must* be dark when she could not find the way to the Hall, which was almost in a straight line from the cottage, and little more than a quarter of a mile off. It was very much darker, and it still snowed, though not so thickly as when she had come. She and Margaret walked side by side, at a quick pace, talking together about poor Phœbe. Just as she was approaching the extremity of the village, nearest the park—

"Ah! my lovely gals!" exclaimed a voice, in a low but most offensive tone—"alone? How uncommon——" Miss Aubrey for a moment seemed thunder-struck at so sudden and unprecedented an occurrence; then she hurried on with a beating heart, whispering to Margaret to keep close to her, and not to be alarmed. The speaker, however, kept pace with them.

"Lovely gals!—wish I'd an umbrella, my angels!—Take my arm? Ah! Pretty gals!" "Who *are* you, sir?" at length exclaimed Kate, spiritedly, suddenly stopping, and turning to the rude speaker. [Who else should it be but Tittlebat Titmouse!] "Who am I? Ah, ah! Lovely gals! one that loves the pretty gals."

"Do you know, fellow, who I am?" inquired Miss Aubrey indignantly, flinging aside her veil, and disclosing her beautiful face, white as death, but indistinctly visible in the darkness, to her insolent assailant. "No, 'pon my soul, no; but—lovely gal! lovely gal!—'pon my life, spirited gal!—do you no harm! Take my arm?" "Wretch! ruffian! How dare you insult a lady in this manner? Do you know who I am? My name, sir, is Aubrey—I am Miss Aubrey of the Hall! Do not think——"

Titmouse felt as if he were on the point of dropping down dead at that moment, with amazement and terror; and when Miss Aubrey's servant screamed out at the top of her voice, "Help!—help, there!" Titmouse, without uttering a syllable more, took to his heels, just as the door of a cottage, at only a few yards' distance, opened, and out rushed a strapping farmer, shouting—"Hey!

what be t'matter?" You may guess his astonishment on discovering Miss Aubrey, and his fury at learning the cause of her alarm. Out of doors he pelted, without his hat, uttering a volley of fearful imprecations, and calling on the unseen miscreant to come forward; for whom it was lucky that he had time to escape from a pair of fists that in a minute or two would have beaten his little carcase into a jelly! Miss Aubrey was so overcome by the shock she had suffered, that but for a glass of water she might have fainted. As soon as she had a little recovered from her agitation, she set off home, accompanied by Margaret, and followed very closely by the farmer, with a tremendous knotted stick under his arm—he wanted to have taken his double-barrelled gun—and thus she soon reached the Hall, not a little tired and agitated. This little incident, however, she kept to herself, and enjoined her two attendants to do the same; for she knew the distress it would have occasioned those whom she loved. As it was, she was somewhat sharply rebuked by her mother and brother, who had just sent two men out in quest of her, and whom it was singular that she should have missed. This is not the place to give an account of the eccentric movements of our friend Titmouse; still there can be no harm in my just mentioning that the sight of Miss Aubrey on horseback had half maddened the little fool; her image had never been effaced from his memory since the occasion on which, as already explained, he had first seen her; and as soon as he had ascertained, through Snap's inquiries, who she was, he became more frenzied in the matter than before, because he thought he now saw a probability of obtaining her. He had unbosomed himself in the matter to his confidential adviser Mr. Snap; who, having accomplished his errand, had the day before returned to town, very much against his will, leaving Titmouse behind him, to bring about, by his own delicate and skilful management, a union between himself, as the future lord of Yatton, and the beautiful sister of its present occupant.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. AUBREY and Kate were sitting together playing at chess, about eight o'clock in the evening; Dr. Tatham and Mrs. Aubrey, junior, looking on with much interest; old Mrs. Aubrey being busily engaged writing. Mr. Aubrey was sadly an overmatch for poor Kate—he being in fact a first-rate player; and her soft white hand had been hovering over the half-dozen chessmen she had left, uncertain which of them to move, for nearly two minutes; her chin resting on the other hand, and her face wearing a very puzzled expression. "Come, Kate," said every now and then her brother, with that calm victorious smile which at such a moment would have tried any but so sweet a temper as his sister's. "If I were you, Miss Aubrey," was perpetually exclaiming Dr. Tatham, knowing as much about the game the while as the little Marlborough spaniel lying asleep at Miss Aubrey's feet. "Oh, dear!" said Kate, at length, with a sigh, "I really don't see how to escape——"

"Who can that be?" exclaimed Mrs. Aubrey looking up and listening to the sound of carriage wheels.

"Never mind," said her husband, who was interested in the game—"come, come, Kate." A few minutes afterwards a servant made his appearance, and, coming up to Mr. Aubrey, told him that Mr. Parkinson and another gentleman had called, and were waiting in the library to speak to him on business.

"What can they want at this hour?" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey absently, intently

watching an expected move of his sister's, which would have decided the game. At length she made her long-meditated descent, in quite an unexpected quarter. "Checkmate!" she exclaimed with infinite glee. "Ah!" cried he, rising, with a slightly surprised and chagrined air, "I'm ruined! Now, try your hand on the doctor, while I go and speak to these people. I wonder what can possibly have brought them here. Oh, I see—I see; 'tis probably about Miss Evelyn's marriage-settlement—I'm to be one of her trustees." With this he left the room, and presently entered the library, where were two gentlemen, one of whom, a stranger, was in the act of pulling off his great-coat. It was Mr. Runnington; a tall, thin, elderly man, with short grey hair—his countenance bespeaking the calm, acute, clear-headed man of business. The other was Mr. Parkinson; a plain, substantial-looking, hard-headed country attorney.

"Mr. Runnington, my London agent, sir," he said to Mr. Aubrey, as the latter entered. Mr. Aubrey bowed. "Pray, gentlemen, be seated," he replied with his usual urbanity of manner, taking a chair beside them. "Why, Mr. Parkinson, you look very serious—both of you. What is the matter?" he inquired surprisedly. "Mr. Runnington, sir, has arrived, most unexpectedly to me," replied Mr. Parkinson, "only an hour or two ago, from London, on business of the last importance to you." "*To me!*—well, what is it? Pray, say at once what it is—I am all attention," said Mr. Aubrey anxiously. "Do you happen," commenced Mr. Parkinson very nervously, "to remember sending Waters to me on Monday or Tuesday last, with a paper which had been served by some one on old Jolter?" "Certainly," replied Mr. Aubrey, after a moment's consideration. "Mr. Runnington's errand is connected with that document," said Mr. Parkinson, and paused. "Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, apparently a little relieved. "I assure you, gentlemen, you very greatly over-estimate the importance I attach to anything that such a troublesome person as Mr. Tomkins can do, if I am right in supposing that it is he who— Well, then, what is the matter?" he inquired quickly, observing Mr. Parkinson shake his head, and interchange a grave look with Mr. Runnington; "you cannot think, Mr. Parkinson, how you will oblige me by being explicit."

"This paper," said Mr. Runnington, holding up that which Mr. Aubrey at once recollected as the one on which he had cast his eye on its being handed to him by Waters, "is a Declaration of Ejectment, with which Mr. Tomkins has nothing whatever to do. It is served virtually on *you*, and you are the real defendant." "So I apprehend I was in the former trumpery action." "Do you recollect, Mr. Aubrey," said Mr. Parkinson, with a trepidation which he could not conceal, "several years ago, some serious conversation which you and I had together on the state of your title—when I was preparing your marriage-settlements?" Mr. Aubrey started, and his face was suddenly blanched. "The matters we then discussed have suddenly acquired fearful importance. This paper occasions us, on your account, the profoundest anxiety." Mr. Aubrey continued silent, gazing on Mr. Parkinson with intensity. "Supposing, from a hasty glance at it, and from the message accompanying it, that it was merely another action of Tomkins's about the slip of waste land attached to Jolter's cottage, I sent up to London to my agents, Messrs. Runnington, requesting them to call on the plaintiff's attorneys, and settle the action. He did so; and—perhaps you will explain the rest," said Mr. Parkinson to Mr. Runnington.

"Certainly," said that gentleman with a serious air, but much more calmly and firmly than Mr. Parkinson; "I called accordingly, early yesterday morning, on Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—they are a very well—but not enviably—known firm in the profession; and in a very few minutes my misconception of the nature of the business I had called to settle was set right. In short——" he paused, as if distressed at the intelligence he was about to communicate,

"Oh, pray, pray go on, sir," said Mr. Aubrey in a low tone. "I am no stranger, sir, to your firmness of character; but I shall have to tax it, I fear, to its uttermost. To come at once to the point—they told me that I might undoubtedly *settle* the matter, if you would consent to give up immediate possession of *the whole Yatton estate*, and account for the mesne profits to their client, the right heir—as they contend—a Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse."

Mr. Aubrey leaned back in his chair, overcome, for an instant, by this astounding intelligence; and all three of them preserved silence for more than a minute. Mr. Runnington was a man of a very feeling heart. In the course of his great practice he had had to encounter many distressing scenes; but probably none of them had equalled that in which, at the earnest entreaty of Mr. Parkinson, who distrusted his own self-possession, he now bore a leading part. The two attorneys interchanged frequent looks of deep sympathy for their unfortunate client, who seemed as if stunned by the intelligence they had brought him.

"I felt it my duty to lose not an instant in coming down to Yatton," resumed Mr. Runnington, observing Mr. Aubrey's eye again directed inquiringly towards him; "for Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap are very dangerous people to deal with, and must be encountered promptly, and with the greatest possible caution. The moment that I had left them, I hastened to the Temple, to retain for you Mr. Subtle, the leader of the Northern Circuit; but they had been beforehand with me, and retained him nearly three months ago, together with another eminent king's counsel on the circuit. Under these circumstances, I lost no time in giving a special retainer to the attorney-general, in which I trust I have done right, and in retaining as junior a gentleman whom I consider to be incomparably the ablest and most experienced lawyer on the circuit."

"Did they say anything concerning the nature of their client's title?" inquired Mr. Aubrey, after some expressions of amazement and dismay.

"Very little—I might say, nothing. If they had been *never* so precise, of course I should have distrusted every word they said. They certainly mentioned that they had the first conveyancing opinions in the kingdom, which concurred in favour of their client; that they had been for months prepared at all points, and accident only had delayed their commencing proceedings till now." "Did you make any inquiries as to who the claimant was?" inquired Mr. Aubrey. "Yes; but all I could learn was, that they had discovered him by mere accident; and that he was at present in very obscure and distressed circumstances. I tried to discover by what means they proposed to commence and carry on so expensive a contest; but they smiled significantly, and were silent." Another long pause ensued, during which Mr. Aubrey was evidently silently struggling with very agitating emotions.

"What is the meaning of their affecting to seek the recovery of only one insignificant portion of the property?" he inquired. "It is their own choice—it may be from considerations of mere convenience. The title, however, by which they may succeed in recovering what they at present go for, will avail to recover every acre of the estate, and the present action will consequently decide everything!"

"And suppose the worst—that they are successful," said Mr. Aubrey, after they had conversed a good deal, and very anxiously, on the subject of a presumed infirmity in Mr. Aubrey's title, which had been pointed out to him in general terms by Mr. Parkinson, on the occasion already adverted to: "What is to be said about the rental which I have been receiving all this time—ten thousand a-year?" inquired Mr. Aubrey, looking as if he dreaded to hear his question answered. "Oh! that's quite an after consideration—let us first fight the battle." "I beg, Mr. Runnington, that you will withhold

nothing from me," said Mr. Aubrey. "To what extent shall I be liable?" Mr. Runnington paused. "I am afraid that *all* the mesne profits, as they are called, which you have received," commenced Mr. Parkinson—— "No, no," interrupted Mr. Runnington; "I have been turning that matter over in my mind, and I think that the statute of limitations will bar all but the last six years——" "Why, *that* will be sixty thousand pounds!" interrupted Mr. Aubrey, with a look of sudden despair. "Gracious heavens, that is perfectly frightful!—frightful! If I lose Yatton, I shall not have a place to put my head in—not one farthing to support myself with! And yet to have to make up *sixty thousand pounds!*" The perspiration stood upon his forehead, and his eye was laden with alarm and agony. He slowly rose from his chair and bolted the door, that they might not, at such an agitating moment, be surprised or disturbed by any of the servants or the family.

"I suppose," said he in a faint and tremulous tone, "that if this claim succeed, my mother also will share my fate——" They shook their heads in silence. "Permit me to suggest," said Mr. Runnington, in a tone of the most respectful sympathy, "that sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." "But the *night* follows!" said Mr. Aubrey, with a visible tremor; and his voice made the hearts of his companions thrill within them. "I have a frightful misgiving as to the issue of these proceedings! I ought not to have neglected the matter pointed out to me by Mr. Parkinson on my marriage. I feel as if I had been culpably lying by ever since. But I really did not attach to it the importance it deserved; I never, indeed, distinctly appreciated the nature of what was then pointed out to me!"

"A thousand pities that a *fine* was not *levied*, is it not?" said Mr. Runnington. "Ay, indeed it is!" replied Mr. Parkinson with a sigh, and they spoke together for some time, and very earnestly, concerning the nature and efficacy of such a measure, which they explained to Mr. Aubrey.

"It comes to this," said he, "that in all probability I and my family are at this moment"—he shuddered—"trespassers at Yatton!"

"That, Mr. Aubrey," said Mr. Parkinson earnestly, "remains to be proved! We really are getting on far too fast. One would think that the jury had already returned a verdict against us—that judgment had been signed—and that the sheriff was coming in the morning to execute the writ of possession in favour of our opponent." This was well meant by the speaker; but surely it was like talking of the machinery of the ghastly guillotine to the wretch in shivering expectation of suffering by it on the morrow. An involuntary shudder ran through Mr. Aubrey. "Sixty thousand pounds!" he exclaimed, rising and walking to and fro. "Why, I am ruined beyond all redemption! How can I ever satisfy it?" Again he paced the room several times, in silent agony. Presently he resumed his seat. "I have, for these several days past, had a strange sense of impending calamity," said he, more calmly—"I have been equally unable to account for, or get rid of it. It may be an intimation from Heaven; I bow to its will!"

"We must remember," said Mr. Runnington, "that '*possession is nine-tenths of the law*': which means, that your mere possession will entitle you to retain it against all the world, till a stronger title than yours to the right of possession be made out. You stand on a mountain; and it is for your adversary to displace you, not by showing merely that you have no real title, but that *he has*. If he could prove all your title-deeds to be merely waste paper—that in fact you have no more title than I have—he would not by stopping there advance his own case an inch; he must *first* establish in himself a clear and independent title; so that you are entirely on the defensive; and rely upon it, that though never so many screws may be loose, so acute and profound a lawyer as the Attorney-General will impose every difficulty on——"

"Nay, but God forbid that any unconscientious advantages should be taken on my behalf!" said Mr. Aubrey. Mr. Runnington and Mr. Parkinson both opened their eyes pretty wide at this sally: the latter could not understand but that everything was fair in war; the former saw and appreciated the nobility of soul which had dictated the exclamation.

"I suppose the affair will soon become public," said Mr. Aubrey, with an air of profound depression, after much further conversation.

"Your position in the county, your eminence in public life, the singularity of the case, and the magnitude of the stake—all are circumstances undoubtedly calculated soon to urge the affair before the notice of the public," said Mr. Runnington.

"What disastrous intelligence to break to my family!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey tremulously. "With what fearful suddenness it has burst upon us! But something, I suppose," he presently added with forced calmness, "must be done immediately?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Runnington. "Mr. Parkinson and I will immediately proceed to examine your title-deeds, the greater portion of which are, I understand, here in the Hall, and the rest at Mr. Parkinson's; and prepare, without delay, a case for the opinion of the Attorney-General, and also of the most eminent conveyancers of the kingdom. Who, by the way," said Mr. Runnington, addressing Mr. Parkinson—"who was the conveyancer that had the abstracts befo e him, on preparing Mr. Aubrey's marriage-settlement?"

"Oh, you are alluding to the '*Opinion*' I mentioned to you this evening?" inquired Mr. Parkinson. "I have it at my house, and will show it you in the morning. The doubt he expressed on one or two points gave me, I recollect, no little uneasiness—as *you* may remember, Mr. Aubrey."

"I certainly do," he replied, with a profound sigh; "but though what you said reminded me of something or another that I had heard when a mere boy, I thought no more of it. I think you also told me that the gentleman who wrote the opinion was a nervous fidgety man, always raising difficulties in his clients' titles—and one way or another, the thing never gave me any concern—scarcely ever even occurred to my thoughts, till to-day! What infatuation has been mine! But you will take a little refreshment, gentlemen, after your journey?" said Mr. Aubrey suddenly, glad of the opportunity it would afford him of reviving his own exhausted spirits by a cup of wine, before returning to the drawing-room. He swallowed several glasses of wine without any immediately perceptible effect; and the bearers of the direful intelligence just communicated to the reader, after a promise by Mr. Aubrey to drive over to Grilston early in the morning, and bring with him such of his title-deeds as were then at the Hall, took their departure; leaving him outwardly calmer, but with a fearful oppression at his heart. He made a powerful effort to control his feelings, so as to conceal, for a while at least, the dreadful occurrence of the evening. His face, however, on re-entering the drawing-room, which his mother, attended by Kate, had quitted for her bed-room, somewhat alarmed Mrs. Aubrey; whom, however, he at once quieted, by saying that he certainly *had* been annoyed—"excessively annoyed"—at a communication just made to him; "and which might, in fact, prevent his sitting again for Yatton." "Oh, that's the cause of your long stay? There, Doctor, am I not right?" said Mrs. Aubrey, appealing to Dr. Tatham. "Did I not tell you that this was something connected with politics? Charles, I do *hate* politics—give *me* a quiet home!" A pang shot through Mr. Aubrey's heart; but he felt that he had, for the present, succeeded in his object.

Mr. Aubrey's distracted mind was indeed, as it were, buffeted about that night on a dark sea of trouble; while the beloved being beside him lay sleeping peacefully, all unconscious of the rising storm. Many times, during that dismal

night, would he have risen from his bed to seek a momentary relief by walking to and fro, but that he feared disturbing her, and disclosing the extent and depth of his distress. It was nearly five o'clock in the morning before he at length sunk into sleep; and of one thing I can assure the reader, that however that excellent man might have shrunk—and shrink he did—from the sufferings that seemed in store for him, and those who were far dearer to him than life itself, he did not give way to one repining or rebellious thought. On the contrary, his real frame of mind, on that trying occasion, may be discovered in one short prayer, which he more than once was on the point of expressing aloud in words—"Oh my God! in my prosperity I have ever acknowledged Thee; forsake me not in my adversity!"

At an early hour in the morning his carriage drew up at Mr. Parkinson's door; and he brought with him, as he had promised, a great number of title-deeds and family documents. On these, as well as on many others which were in Mr. Parkinson's custody, that gentleman and Mr. Runnington were anxiously engaged during almost every minute of that day and the ensuing one; at the close of which, they had between them drawn up the rough draft of a case, with which Mr. Runnington set off for town by the mail; undertaking to lay it immediately before the Attorney-General, and also before one or two of the greatest conveyancers of the day, commended to their best and earliest attention. He pledged himself to transmit their opinions, by the very first mail, to Mr. Parkinson; and both those gentlemen immediately set about active preparations for defending the ejectment. The "eminent conveyancer" fixed upon by Messrs. Runnington and Parkinson was Mr. Tresayle, whose clerk, however, on looking into the papers, presently carried them back to Messrs. Runnington, with the startling information that Mr. Tresayle, had, a few months ago, "advised on the other side." The next person whom Mr. Runnington thought of, was—singularly enough—Mr. Mortmain, who, on account of his eminence, was occasionally employed, in heavy matters, by the firm. His clerk, also, on the ensuing morning returned the papers, assigning a similar reason to that which had been given by Mr. Tresayle's clerk! All this formed a sad corroboration, of Messrs. Quirk and Gammon's assurance to Mr. Runnington, that they had "had the first conveyancing opinions in the kingdom"; and evidenced the formidable scale on which their operations were being conducted. There were, however, other "eminent conveyancers" besides the two above mentioned: and in the hands of Mr. Mansfield, who, with a less extended reputation, but an equal practice, was a far abler man, and a much higher style of conveyancer than Mr. Mortmain, Mr. Runnington left his client's interests with the utmost confidence. Not satisfied with this, he laid the case also before Mr. Crystal, the junior whom he had already retained in the cause—a man whose lucid understanding was not ill indicated by his name. Though his manner in court was not particularly forcible or attractive, he was an invaluable acquisition in an important cause.

As Mr. Aubrey was driving home from the visit to Mr. Parkinson, which I have just above mentioned, he stopped his carriage on entering the village, because he saw Dr. Tatham coming out of Williams's cottage, where he had been paying a visit to poor dying Phœbe.

The little Doctor was plunthering on, ankle-deep in snow, towards the Vicarage, when Mr. Aubrey (who had sent home his carriage with word that he should presently follow) came up with him, and greeting him with unusual fervour, said that he would accompany him to the Vicarage.

"You are in very great trouble, my dear friend," said the Doctor seriously—"I saw it plainly last night; but of course I said nothing. Come in with me! Let us talk freely with one another; for, *as iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend.* Is it not so?"

"It is indeed, my dear Doctor," replied Mr. Aubrey, suddenly softened by the affectionate simplicity of the Doctor's manner. How much the good Doctor was shocked by the communication which Mr. Aubrey presently made to him, the reader may easily imagine. He even shed tears on beholding the forced calmness with which Mr. Aubrey depicted the gloomy prospect that was before him. 'Twas not in vain, however, that the pious and venerable pastor led the subdued and willing mind of his beloved companion to those sources of consolation and support which a true Christian cannot approach in vain. Upon his bruised and bleeding feelings were poured the balm of true religious consolation; and Mr. Aubrey quitted his revered companion with a far firmer tone of mind than that with which he had entered the Vicarage. But when he passed through the park gates, the sudden reflection that he was probably no longer the proprietor of the dear old familiar objects that met his eye at every step, almost overpowered him.

On entering the Hall, he was informed that one of the tenants, Peter Johnson, had been sitting in the servants' hall for nearly two hours, waiting to see him. Mr. Aubrey repaired at once to the library, and desired the man to be shown in. This Johnson had been for some twenty-five years a tenant of a considerable farm on the estate, had scarcely ever been a few weeks behindhand with his rent, and had always been considered one of the most exemplary persons in the whole neighbourhood. He had now, poor fellow, got into trouble indeed, for he had, a year or two before, been persuaded to become security for his brother-in-law, a taxcollector; and had, alas! the day before, been called upon to pay the three hundred pounds in which he stood bound—his worthless brother-in-law having absconded with nearly £1,000 of the public money. Poor Johnson, who had a large family to support, was in deep tribulation, bowed down with grief and shame; and after a sleepless night, had at length ventured down to Yatton, and with a desperate boldness asked the benevolent Squire to advance him £200 towards the money, to save himself from being cast into prison. Mr. Aubrey heard his sad story to the end without one single interruption; though to a more practised observer than the troubled old farmer, the workings of his countenance, from time to time, must have told his inward agitation. "I lend this poor soul £200!" thought he, "who am penniless myself! Shall I not be really acting as *his* dishonest relative has been acting, and making free with money that belongs to another?"

"I assure you, my worthy friend," said he at length, with a little agitation of manner, "that I have just now a very serious call upon me—or you know how gladly I would have complied with your request." "Oh, sir, have mercy on me? I've an ailing wife and seven children to support," said poor Johnson, wringing his hands. "Can't I do anything with the Government?—" "No, sir; I'm told they're so mighty angry with my rascally brother, they'll listen to nobody! It's a hard matter for me to keep things straight at home without this, sir, I've so many mouths to fill; and if they take me off to prison, Lord! what's to become of us all?"

Mr. Aubrey's lip quivered. Johnson fell on his knees, and the tears ran down his cheeks. "I've never asked a living man for money before, sir; and if you'll only lend it me, God Almighty will bless you and yours; you'll save us all from ruin; I'll work day and night to pay it back again!" "Rise—rise, Johnson," said Mr. Aubrey with emotion. "You shall have the money, my friend, if you will call to-morrow," he added with a deep sigh, after a moment's hesitation. He was as good as his word.

Had Mr. Aubrey been naturally of a cheerful and vivacious turn, the contrast now afforded by his gloomy manner must have alarmed his family. As it was, however, it was not so strong and marked as to be attended with that effect, especially as he exerted himself to the utmost to conceal his distress. That

something had gone wrong, he freely acknowledged; and as he spoke of it always in connection with political topics, he succeeded in parrying their questions, and checking suspicion. But, whenever they were all collected together, could he not justly compare them to a happy group, unconscious that they stood on a mine which was about to be fired?

About a week afterwards, namely, on the 12th of January, arrived little Charles's birthday, when he became five years old; and Kate had for some days been moving heaven and earth to get up a children's party in honour of the occasion. After considerable riding and driving about, she succeeded in persuading the parents of some eight or ten children—two little daughters, for instance, of the Earl of Oldacre (beautiful creatures they were, to be sure)—little Master and the two Miss Bertons, the children of one of the county members—Sir Harry Oldfield, an orphan of about five years of age, the infant possessor of a magnificent estate—and two or three little girls beside—to send them all to Yatton for a day and a night, with their governesses and attendants.

'Twas a charming little affair. It went off brilliantly, as the phrase is, and repaid all Kate's exertions. She, her mother, and brother, and sister, all dined at the same table, at a very early hour, with the merry little guests, who (with a laughable crowd of attendants behind them, to be sure) behaved remarkably well on the occasion. Sir Harry (a little thing about Charles's age—the black riband round his waist, and also the half-mourning dress worn by his maid, who stood behind him, showed how recent was the event which had made him an orphan) proposed little Aubrey's health, in (I must own) a somewhat stiff speech demurely dictated to him by Kate (who sat between him and her beautiful little nephew). She then performed the same office for Charles, who stood on a chair while delivering his eloquent acknowledgment of the toast.

[Oh! that anguished brow of thine, Aubrey, (thank God it is unobserved!) but it tells *me* that the iron is entering thy soul!]

And the moment that he had done—Kate folding her arms around him and kissing him—down they all jumped, and, a merry throng, scampered off to the drawing-room (followed by Kate), where blind-man's buff, husbands and wives, and divers other little games, kept them in constant enjoyment. After tea they were to have dancing—Kate mistress of the ceremonies—and it was quite laughable to see how perpetually she was foiled in her efforts to form the little sets. The girls were orderly enough—but their wild little partners were quite uncontrollable. The instant they were placed, and Kate had gone to the instrument and struck off a note or two—*heigh!*—there was a scrambling little crowd, jumping and laughing, and chattering and singing! Over and over again she formed them into sets, with the like results. But at length a young lady, one of their governesses, took Miss Aubrey's place at the piano, leaving the latter to superintend the performances in person. She at length succeeded in getting up something like a country-dance, led off by Charles and little Lady Anne Cherville, the eldest daughter of the Earl of Oldacre,

beautiful child of about five years old, and who, judging from appearances, bade fair, in due time, to become another Lady Caroline Caversham. You would have laughed outright to watch the coquettish airs which this little creature gave herself with Charles, whom yet she evidently could not bear to see dancing with another.

"Now I shall dance with somebody else!" he exclaimed, suddenly letting go Lady Anne, and snatching hold of a sweet little thing, Miss Berton, that was standing modestly beside him. The discarded beauty walked, with a stately air and a swelling heart, towards Mrs. Aubrey, who sat beside her husband on the sofa; and on reaching her, she stood for a few moments silently watching her late partner busily and gaily engaged with her successor—and then burst into tears.

"Charles!" called out Mrs. Aubrey; who had watched the whole affair, and could hardly keep her countenance—"come here directly, Charles." "Yes, mamma!" he exclaimed—quite unaware of the serious aspect which things were assuming—and without quitting the dance, where he was (as his jealous mistress too plainly saw, for, despite her grief, her eye seemed to follow all his motions) skipping about with infinite glee with a *third* partner—a laughing sister of his last partner.

"Come here, Charles," said Mr. Aubrey; and in an instant his little son, all flushed and breathless, was at his side. "Well, dear papa!" said he, keeping his eye fixed on the little throng he had just quitted, and where his deserted partner was skipping about alone. "What have you been doing to Lady Anne, Charles!" said his father.

"Nothing, dear papa!" he replied, still wistfully eyeing the dancers. "You know you left me, and went to dance with Miss Berton; you did, Charles!" said the offended beauty.

"That is not behaving like a little gentleman, Charles," said his father. The tears came into the child's eyes. "I'm *very* sorry, dear papa, I *will* dance with her" — "No, not now," said Lady Anne, haughtily. "Oh, pooh! pooh! kiss and be friends," said Mrs. Aubrey, laughing, "and go and dance as prettily as you were doing before." Little Aubrey put his arms round Lady Anne, kissed her, and away they both started to the dance again.

While the latter part of this scene was going on, Mr. Aubrey's eye caught the figure of a servant who simply made his appearance at the door and then retired (for such had been Mr. Aubrey's orders, in the event of any messenger coming from Grilston). Hastily whispering that he should return soon, he left the room. In the hall stood a clerk from Mr. Parkinson; and on seeing Mr. Aubrey, he took out a packet and retired—Mr. Aubrey, with evident trepidation, repairing to his library. With a nervous hand he broke the seal, and found the following letter from Mr. Parkinson, with three other inclosures:—

Grilston, 12th Jan. 18—

"MY DEAR SIR,

"I have only just received, and at once forward to you, copies of the three opinions given by the Attorney-General, Mr. Mansfield, and Mr. Crystal. I lament to find that they are all of a discouraging character. They are quite independent of each other, having been laid before their respective writers at the same moment; yet you will observe that all three of them have hit upon precisely the same point, viz., that the descendants of Geoffry Dreddlington had no right to succeed to the inheritance till there was a failure of the heirs of Stephen Dreddlington. If, therefore, our opponents have contrived to ferret out any one who satisfies that designation (I cannot conjecture how they can ever have got upon the scent), I really fear we must prepare for a very serious struggle. I have been quietly pushing my inquiries in all directions, with a view to obtaining a clue to the case intended to be set up against us, and which you will find very shrewdly guessed at by the Attorney-General. *Nor am I the only party*, I find, in the field, who has been making pointed inquiries in your neighbourhood; but of this more when we meet to-morrow.—I remain, yours very respectfully,

"J. PARKINSON,

"CHARLES AUBREY, ESQ., M.P."

Having read this letter, Mr. Aubrey sunk back in his chair, and remained motionless for more than a quarter of an hour. At length he roused himself and read over the opinions; the effects of which—as far as he could comprehend their technicalities—he found had been but too correctly given by Mr. Parkinson. Some suggestions and inquiries put by the acute and experienced Mr.

Crystal, suddenly revived recollections of one or two incidents even in his boyish days, long forgotten, but which, as he reflected upon them, began to reappear to his mind's eye with sickening distinctness. Wave after wave of apprehension and agony passed over him, chilling and benumbing his heart within him; so that, when his little son came some time afterwards running up to him, with a message from his mamma, that she hoped he could come back to see them all play at snapdragon before they went to bed, he answered him mechanically, hardly seeming sensible even of his presence. At length, with a groan that came from the depths of his heart, he rose and walked to and fro, sensible of the necessity of exerting himself, and preparing himself, in some degree, for encountering his mother, his wife, and his sister. Taking up his candle, he hastened to his dressing-room, where he hoped, by the aid of refreshing ablutions, to succeed in effacing at least the stronger of those traces of suffering which his glass displayed to him, as it reflected the image of his agitated countenance. A sudden recollection of the critical and delicate situation of his idolized wife, glanced through his heart like a keen arrow. He sunk upon the sofa, and, clasping his hands, looked indeed forlorn. Presently the door was pushed hastily but gently open; and, first looking in to see that it was really he of whom she was in search, in rushed Mrs. Aubrey, pale and agitated, having been alarmed by his long-continued absence from the drawing-room, and the look of the servant, from whom she had learned that his master had been for some time gone up-stairs.

"Charles! my love! my sweet love!" she exclaimed, rushing up to him, sitting down beside him, and casting her arms round his neck. Overcome by the suddenness of her appearance and movements, for a moment he spoke not. "For mercy's sake—as you love me! tell me, dearest Charles, what has happened!" "Nothing—love—nothing," he replied; but his looks belied his speech.

"Oh! am not I your wife, dearest? Charles, I shall really go distracted if you do not tell me what has happened. I know that something—something dreadful—" He put his arm round her waist, and drew her tenderly towards him. He felt her heart beating violently. He kissed her cold forehead, but spoke not. "Come, dearest! let me share your sorrows," said she in a thrilling voice. "Cannot you trust your Agnes? Has not Heaven *sent* me to share your anxieties and griefs?"

"I love you, Agnes! ay, more than ever man loved woman!" he faltered, as he felt her arms folding him in closer and closer embrace; and she gazed at him with wild agitation, expecting presently to hear of some fearful catastrophe.

"I cannot bear this much longer, dearest—I feel I cannot," said she, rather faintly. "What has happened? What, that you dare not tell *me*? I can bear anything, while I have you and my children! You have been very unhappy, my own Charles, for many days past. I have felt that you were!—I will not part with you till I know all!"

"You soon *must* know all, my sweet love; and I take Heaven to witness, that it is principally on your account, and that of my children, that I—in fact, I did not wish any of you to have known it till—" "You—are never going—to fight a duel?" she gasped, turning white as death.—"Oh! no, no, Agnes! I solemnly assure you! If I could have brought myself to engage in such an unhallowed affair, would *this* scene ever first have occurred? No, no, my own love! Must I then tell you of the misfortune that has overtaken us?" His words somewhat restored her, but she continued to gaze at him in mute and breathless apprehension. "Let me then conceal nothing, Agnes—they are bringing an action against me, which, if successful, may cause us all to quit Yatton—and it may be for ever."

"Oh, Charles!" she murmured, her eyes riveted upon his, while she un-

consciously moved still nearer to him and trembled. Her head dropped upon his shoulder. "Why is this?" she whispered, after a pause.—"Let us, dearest, talk of it another time. I have now told you what you asked me."—He poured her out a glass of water. Having drank a little, she appeared revived. "Is all lost? Do, my own Charles—let me know really the worst!"—"We are young, Agnes, and have the world before us. Health and honour are better than riches. You and our little loves—the children which God has given us—are my riches," said he, gazing with unspeakable tenderness at her. "Even should it be the will of Heaven that this affair should go against us—so long as they cannot separate us from each other, they cannot really hurt us." She suddenly kissed him with frantic energy, and an hysteric smile gleamed over her pallid excited features.

"Calm yourself, Agnes!—calm yourself, for my sake!—as you love me!" His voice quivered. "Oh, how very weak and foolish I have been to yield to ——"

"No, no, no!" she gasped, evidently labouring with hysteric oppression. "Hush!" said she, suddenly starting, and wildly leaning forward towards the door which opened into the gallery leading to the various bedrooms. He listened—the mother's ear had been quick and true. He presently heard the sound of many children's voices approaching: they were the little party, accompanied by Kate, on their way to bed; and little Charles's voice was loudest, and his laugh the merriest of them all. A wild smile gleamed on Mrs. Aubrey's face; her hand grasped her husband's with convulsive pressure; and she suddenly sunk, rigid and senseless, upon the sofa. He seemed for a moment stunned at the sight of her motionless figure. Soon, however, recovering his presence of mind, he rang the bell, and one or two female attendants quickly appeared; and by their joint assistance Mrs. Aubrey was carried to her bed in the adjoining room, where, by the use of the ordinary remedies, she was presently restored to consciousness. Her first languid look was towards Mr. Aubrey, whose hand she slowly raised to her lips. She tried to throw a smile over her wan features—but 'twas in vain; and, after a few heavy and half-choking sobs, her over-charged feelings found relief in a flood of tears. Full of the liveliest apprehensions as to the effect of this violent emotion upon her, in her critical condition, he remained with her for some time, pouring into her ear every soothing and tender expression he could think of. He at length succeeded in bringing her into a somewhat more tranquil state than he could have expected. He strictly enjoined the attendants, who had not quitted their lady's chamber, and whose alarmed and inquisitive looks he had noticed for some time with anxiety, to preserve silence concerning what they had so unexpectedly witnessed, adding, that something unfortunate had happened, of which they would hear but too soon.

"Are you going to tell Kate?" whispered Mrs. Aubrey sorrowfully. "Surely, love, *you* have suffered enough through *my* weakness. Wait till to-morrow. Let her—poor girl!—have a *few* more happy hours!"

"No, Agnes—it was my own weakness which caused me to be surprised into this premature disclosure to you. And now I *must* meet her again to-night, and I cannot control either my features or my feelings. Yes, poor Kate, she must know all to-night! I shall not be long absent, Agnes." And directing her maid to remain with her till he returned, he withdrew, and with slow step and heavy heart descended to the library; preparing himself for another heart-breaking scene—plunging another innocent and joyous creature into misery, which he believed to be inevitable. Having looked into the drawing-room as he passed it, and seen no one there—his mother having, as usual, retired at a very early hour—he rung his library bell, and desired Miss Aubrey's maid to request her mistress to come down to him there, as soon as she was at leisure. He was glad that the only light in the room was that

given out by the fire, which was not very bright, and so would in some degree shield his features from, at all events, immediate scrutiny. His heart ached as, shortly afterwards, he heard Kate's light step crossing the hall. When she entered, her eyes sparkled with vivacity, and a smile was on her beautiful cheek. Her dress was slightly disordered, and her hair half uncurled—the results of her sport with the little ones whom she had been seeing to bed.

"What merry little things, to be sure!" she commenced laughingly—"I could not get them to lie still a moment—popping their little heads in and out of the clothes. A fine night I shall have with Sir Harry! for he is to be *my* tiny little bedfellow, and I dare say I shall not sleep a wink all night. Why, Charles, how very—*very* grave you look to-night!" she added quickly, observing his eye fixed moodily upon her.

"Tis you who are so very gay," he replied, endeavouring to smile. "I want to speak to you, dear Kate," he commenced affectionately, "on a serious matter. I have received some letters to-night —"

Kate coloured suddenly and violently, and her heart beat; but, sweet soul! she was mistaken—very, very far off the mark her troubled brother was aiming at. "And relying on your strength of mind, I have resolved to put you at once in possession of what I myself know. Can you bear bad news well, Kate?"

She turned very pale, and drawing her chair nearer to her brother, said, "Do not keep me in suspense, Charles—I can bear anything, but suspense—that is dreadful! What has happened? Oh dear," she added, with sudden alarm, "where are mamma and Agnes?" She started to her feet.

"I assure you they are both well, Kate. My mother is now doubtless asleep, and as well as she ever was; Agnes is in her bedroom—certainly much distressed at the news which I am going —"

"Oh why, Charles, did you tell *anything* distressing to *her*?" exclaimed Miss Aubrey with an alarmed air.

"We came together by surprise, Kate! Perhaps, too, it would have been worse to have kept her in suspense; but she is recovering!—I shall soon return to her. —And now, my dear Kate—I know your strong sense and spirit—a very great calamity hangs over us. Let you and me," he grasped her hands affectionately, "stand it steadily, and support those who cannot!"

"Let me at once know all, Charles. See if I do not bear it as becomes your sister," said she, with forced calmness. "If it should become necessary for all of us to retire into obscurity—into humble obscurity, dear Kate—how, do you think you could bear it?" "If it will be an honourable obscurity—nay, 'tis quite impossible to be a *dis*-honourable obscurity," said Miss Aubrey, with a momentary flash of energy, "Never, never, Kate! The Aubreys may lose everything on earth but the jewel *honour*, and love for one another!" "Let me know all, Charles: I see that something or other shocking has happened," said Miss Aubrey, in a low tone, with a look of the deepest apprehension. "I will tell you the worst, Kate—a strange claim is set up—by one I never heard of—to the whole of the property we now enjoy!"

Miss Aubrey started, and the slight colour that remained faded entirely from her cheek. "But is it a *true* claim, Charles?" she inquired, faintly. "That remains to be proved. But I will disguise nothing from you—I have woful apprehensions——" "Do you mean to say that Yatton *is not ours*?" inquired Miss Aubrey, catching her breath. "So, alas! my dearest Kate, it is said!" Miss Aubrey looked bewildered, and pressed her hand to her forehead. "How shocking! shocking! shocking!" she gasped. "What is to be come of mamma?" "God Almighty will not desert her in her old age. He will desert none of us, if we only trust in Him," said her brother.

Miss Aubrey remained gazing at him intently, and continued perfectly motionless.

"Must we then all leave Yatton?" said she faintly, after a while. "If this claim succeeds,—but we shall leave it *together*, Kate." She threw her arms round his neck, and wept bitterly. "Hush, hush, Kate!" said he, perceiving the increasing violence of her emotions, "restrain your feelings for the sake of my mother, and Agnes."

His words had the desired effect: the poor girl made a desperate effort. Unclasping her arms from her brother's neck, she sat down in a chair, breathing hard; and, after a few minutes' pause, she said faintly, "I am better now. Do tell me more, Charles! Let me have something to *think* about, only don't say anything about—about—mamma and Agnes!" In spite of herself a visible shudder ran through her frame.

"It seems, Kate," said he, with all the calmness he could assume, "at least, they are trying to prove, that our branch of the family has succeeded to the property prematurely—that there is living an heir of the elder branch—that his case has been taken up by powerful friends; and—let me tell you the worst at once—even the lawyers, consulted by Mr. Parkinson on my behalf, take a most alarming view of the possibilities of the case that may be brought against us——"

"But is mamma provided for?" whispered Miss Aubrey, almost inarticulately. "When I look at her again, I shall almost break my heart!" "No, no, Kate, you won't! Heaven will give you strength," said her brother, in a tremulous voice. "Remember, my only sister—my dearest Kate! you must support *me* in my trouble, as I will support you, we will support one another——" "We will, we will!" interrupted Miss Aubrey, instantly checking, however, her rising excitement. "You bear it bravely, my noble girl!" said Mr. Aubrey fondly, after a brief interval of silence.

She turned from him her head, and moved her hand, in deprecation of expressions that might utterly unnerve her. Then she convulsively clasped her hands over her forehead; and, after a minute or two, turned towards him with tears in her eyes, but tranquillized features. The struggle had been dreadful, though brief, her noble spirit recovered itself.

The distressed brother and sister sat conversing for a long time, frequently in tears, but with infinitely greater calmness and firmness than could have been expected. They agreed that Dr. Tatham should very early in the morning be sent for, and implored to take upon himself the bitter duty of breaking the matter as gradually and safely as possible to their mother; its effects upon whom, her children anticipated with the most vivid apprehension. They both considered that an event of such publicity and importance could not possibly remain long unknown to her, and that it was, on the whole, better that the trial should be got over as soon as possible. They then retired—Kate to a sleepless pillow, and her brother to spend a greater portion of the night in attempts to soothe and console his suffering wife; each of them having first knelt in humble reverence, and poured forth the breathings of a stricken and bleeding heart before Him who hath declared that He HEARETH and ANSWERETH prayer.

Ah! who can tell what a day or an hour may bring forth?

"It won't kindle—not a bit on't—it's green and full o' sap. Go out, and get us a log that's dry and old, George, and let's try to have a bit of a blaze in t'ould chimney, this bitter night," said Isaac Tonson, the gamekeeper at Yatton, to the good-natured landlord of the Aubrey Arms, the little and only inn of the village. The suggestion was instantly attended to.

"How Peter's a-feathering of his geese to-night, to be sure!" exclaimed the landlord on his return, shaking the snow off his coat, and laying on the fire a great dry old log of wood, which seemed very acceptable to the hungry flames,

for they licked it cordially the moment it was placed amongst them, and there was very soon given out a cheerful blaze. 'Twas a snug room, the brick floor covered with fresh sand; and on a few stools and benches, with a table in the middle, on which stood a large can and ale-glasses, with a plate of tobacco, sat some half-dozen men, enjoying their pipe and glass. In the chimney corner sat Thomas Dickons, the faithful under-bailiff of Mr. Aubrey, a big, broad-shouldered, middle-aged man, with a hard-featured face and a phlegmatic air. In the opposite corner sat the little grizzle-headed clerk and sexton, old Halleluiah (as he was called, but his real name was Jonas Higgs). Beside him sat Pumpkin, the gardener at the Hall, a very frequent guest at the Aubrey Arms o' nights, always attended by Hector, the large Newfoundland dog, already spoken of, and who was now lying stretched on the floor at Pumpkin's feet, his nose resting on his fore feet, and his eyes, with great gravity, watching the motions of a skittish kitten under the table. Opposite to him sat Tonson, the gamekeeper, a thin, wiry, beetle-browed fellow, with eyes like a ferret; and there were also one or two farmers, that lived in the village.

"Let's ha' another can o' ale, afore ye sit down," said Tonson, "we can do with another half-a-gallon, I'm thinking!" This order also was quickly attended to; and then the landlord, having seen to the door, and fastened the shutters close, took his place on a vacant stool, and resumed his pipe.

"So she do take a very long grave, Jonas?" inquired Dickons, of the sexton, after some little pause. "Ay, Mr. Dickons, a' think she do, t'ould girl! I always thought she would. 'Tis a reg'lar *man's* size, I warrant you; and when parson saw it, a' said, he thought 'twere too big; but I ax'd his pardon, and said I had'n't been sexton for thirty years without knowing my business—ha, ha!"

"I suppose, Jonas, you mun ha' seen her walking about i' t' village, in your time—*Here* she such a big-looking woman?" inquired Pumpkin, as he shook the ashes out of his pipe, and replenished it. "Forty years ago I used to see her—she was then an old woman, wi' white hair, and leaned on a stick—I never thought she'd lasted so long," replied Higgs, emptying his glass. "She've had a pretty long spell on't," quoth Dickons, after slowly emptying his mouth of smoke. "A hundred and two," replied the sexton; "so saith her coffin-plate—a' seed it to-day." "What were her name?" enquired Tonson—"I never knew her by any name but blind Bess." "Her name be *Elizabeth Crabtree* on the coffin," replied Higgs; "and she's to be buried to-morrow." "She were a strange old woman," said Hazel, one of the farmers, as he took down one of the oatcakes that were hanging overhead, and breaking off a piece, held it with the tongs before the fire to toast, and then put it into his ale. "Ay, she were," quoth Pumpkin; "I wonder what she thinks o' such things *now*—maybe she's paying dear for her tricks!" "Tut, Pumpkin," said Tonson, "let t'ould creature rest in her grave peaceably!" "Ay, Master Tonson," quoth the clerk, in his reading-desk twang—"there be no knowledge, nor wisdom, nor device!"

"'Tis very odd," observed Pumpkin, "but this dog that's lying at my feet never could a' bear going past her cottage late o' nights; and the night she died—Lord! you should have heard the howl Hector gave—and a' didn't know then she was gone." "No! but were't really so?" inquired Dickons—several of the others taking their pipes out of their mouths, and looking earnestly at Pumpkin. "I didn't half like it, I assure you," quoth Pumpkin. "Ha, ha, ha!—ha, ha!" laughed the gamekeeper. "Ay, marry you may laugh—but I'll stake half-a-gallon o' ale you daren't go by yourself to the cottage where she's lying—*now*, mind—i' the dark." "I'll do it," quoth Higgs eagerly, preparing to lay down his pipe.

"No, no—*thow't* quite used to dead folk," replied Pumpkin—and, after a little faint drollery, they dropped into silence.

"Bess dropped off sudden, like, at last, didn't she?" inquired the landlord. "She went out, as they say, like the snuff of a candle," replied Jobbins, one of the farmers; "no one were with her but my Missis at the time. The night afore she took to the rattles all of a sudden. My Sall (that's done for her this long time, by madam's orders) says old Bess were a good deal shaken by a chap from London, that came down about a week afore Christmas." "Ay, ay," quoth one, "I've heard o' that—what was it?—what passed atwixt them?" Why, a' don't well know—but he seemed to know summat about t' ould girl's connexions, and he had a book, and wrote down something; and he axed her, so Sall do tell me, such a many things about old people, and things that are long gone by!" "What were the use on't?" inquired Dickons; "for Bess hath been silly this ten years, to my sartain knowledge." "Why, a' couldn't tell. He seemed very 'quisitive, too, about t' ould creature's bible and prayer-book (she kept 'em in that old bag of hers)—and Sall said she talked a good deal to the chap in her mumbling way, and seemed to know some folk he asked her about. And Sall saith she hath been, in a manner, dismal ever since, and often a-crying and talking to herself."

"I've heard," said the landlord, "that Squire and Parson were wi' her on Christmas Day, and that she talked a deal o' strange things, and that the Squire did seem, as it were, *struck* a little, you know, struck, like!" "Why, so my Sall do say; but it may be all her own head," replied Jobbins.

Here a pause took place.

"Madam," said the sexton, "hath given orders for a decent burying to-morrow." "Well, a' never thought any wrong of ould Bess, for my part," said one—and another—and another; and they smoked their pipes for some minutes in silence.

"Talking o' strangers from London," said the sexton presently; "who do know anything o' them two chaps that were at church last Sunday? Two such peacock chaps I never seed afore in *my* time—and grinning all service-time!"

"Ay, *I'll* tell you something of 'em," said Hazel—a big, broad-shouldered farmer, who plucked his pipe out of his mouth with sudden energy—"They're a brace o' good ones, to be sure, ha, ha! Some week or ten days ago, as I were a-coming across the field leading into the lane behind the church, I seed these same two chaps, and on coming nearer (they not seeing me for the hedge), Lord bless me! would ye believe it!—if they wasn't a-teasing my daughter Jenny, that were coming along wi' some physic from the doctor for my old woman! One of 'em seemed a-going to put his arm round her neck, and t'other came close to her on t'other side, a-talking to her and pushing her about." Here a young farmer, who had but seldom spoken, took his pipe out of his mouth, and exclaiming, "Lord bless me!" sat listening with his mouth wide open. "Well, a' came into the road behind 'em, without their seeing me, and"—(here he stretched out a thick, rigid, muscular arm, and clenched his teeth)—"a' got hold of each by the collar, and one of 'em I shook about, and gave him a kick i' the breech that sent him spinning a yard or two on the road, he clapping his hand behind him, and crying, to be sure—'You'll smart for this—a good hundred pound damages!' or summat o' that sort. T'other dropped on his knees, and begged for mercy; so a' just spit in his face, and flung him under t' hedge, telling him if he stirred till I were out o' sight, I'd crack his skull for him; and so I would!" Here the wrathful speaker pushed his pipe again between his lips, and began puffing away with great energy; while he who had appeared to take so great an interest in the story, and who was the very man who had flown to the rescue of Miss Aubrey when she seemed on the point of being similarly treated, told that circumstance exactly as it occurred, amidst the silent but excited wonder of those present—all of whom, at its close, uttered vehement execrations, and intimated the summary and savage

punishment which the cowardly rascal would have experienced at the hands of each and every one of them, had they come across him.

"I reckon," said the landlord, as soon as the swell had a little subsided, "they must be the two chaps that put up here, some time ago, for an hour or so. You should ha' seen 'em get on and off the saddle—that's all! 'Why, a' laughed outright! The chap with the hair under his chin got on upon the wrong side, and t'other seemed as if he thought his beast would a' *bit* him!" "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed all. "I thought they'd a' both got a fall before they'd gone a dozen yards!"

"They've taken a strange fancy to my churchyard," said the sexton, setting down his glass, and then preparing to fill his pipe again; "they've been looking about among 'em—among t' ould gravestones, up behind t' ould yew-tree yonder; and one of them writ something, now and then, in a book; so they're book-writers, in coorse!"

"That's scholars, I reckon," quoth Dickons; "but rot the larning of such chaps as them!"

"I wonder if they'll put a picture o' the Hall in their book," quoth the sexton. "They axed a many questions about the people up there, especially about the Squire's father, and some ould folk, whose names I knew when they spoke of 'em—but I hadn't heard o' them for this forty year. And one of 'em (he were the shortest, and such a chap, to be sure!—just like the monkey that were dressed i' the man's clothes last Grilston fair) talked uncommon fine about young *Miss* ——"

"If I'd a' heard him tak' her name into his dirty mouth, his teeth should a' gone after it!" said Tonson. "Lord! he didn't say any harm—only silly-like—and t'other seemed now and then not to like his going on so. The little one said *Miss* were a lovely gal, or something like that—and hoped they'd become by-and-by better friends—ah, ha!"

"What! wi' that chap?" said Pumpkin—and he looked as if he were meditating putting the little sexton up the chimney, for the mere naming of such a thing.

"I reckon they're fro' London, and brought toon tricks wi' 'em—for I never heard o' such goings on as theirs down *here* afore," said Tonson.

"One of 'em—him that axed me all the questions, and wrote i' t' book, seemed a sharp enough chap in his way; but I can't say much for the little one," said Higgs. "Lud, I couldn't hardly look in his face for laughing, he seemed such a fool!—He had a riding-whip wi' a silver head, and stood smacking his legs (you should ha' seen how tight his clothes was on his legs—I warrant you, Tim Timkins never seed such a thing, I'll be sworn) all the while, as if a' liked to hear the sound of it."

"If I'd a' been beside him," said Hazel, "I'd a' saved him that trouble,—only I'd a' laid it into *another* part of him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" they laughed—and presently passed on to other matters.

"Hath the Squire been doing much lately in Parliament?" inquired the sexton of Dickons.

"Why, yes—he's trying hard to get that new road made from Harkley bridge to Hilton." "Ah, that would save a good four mile, if a' could manage it!"

"I hear the Papists are trying to get the upper hand again—which the Lud forbid!" said the sexton, after another pause. "The Squire hath lately made a speech in that matter, that hath finished them," said Dickons. "What would they be after?" inquired the landlord of Dickons, of whom, in common with all present, he thought great things. "They *say* they wants nothing but what's their own, and liberty, and that like——"

"If thou wert a shepherd, Master Higgs," replied Dickons, "and wert to be asked by ten or a dozen wolves to let them in among thy flock of sheep, they

saying how quiet and kind they would be to 'em—would'st let 'em in, or keep 'em out—eh?" "Ay, ay—that be it—'tis as true as gospel!" said the clerk.

"So you a'n't to have that old sycamore down, after all, Master Dickons?" inquired Tonson. "No; miss hath carried the day against the Squire and Mr. Waters; and there stands the old tree, and it hath to be looked better after than it were afore." "Why hath miss taken such a fancy to it? 'Tis an old crazy thing." "If thou hadst been there when she did beg, as I may say, its life," replied Dickons, with a little energy—"and hadst seen her, and heard her voice, that be as smooth as cream, thou wouldst never have forgotten it, I can tell thee!"

"There isn't a more beautiful lady i' th' county, I reckon, than the Squire's sister?" inquired the sexton.

"No, nor in all England: if there be, I'll lay down a hundred pounds." "And where's to be found a young lady that do go about i' t' village like she?—She were wi' Phœbe Williams t'other night, all through the snow, and i' t' dark." "If I'd only laid hands on that chap?" interrupted the young farmer, her rescuer.

"I wonder she do not choose some one to be married to, up in London," said the landlord. "She'll be having some delicate high quality chap, I reckon, one o' these fine days," said Hazel. "She will be a dainty dish, truly, for whomever God gives her to," quoth Dickons. "Ay, she will," said more than one, in an earnest tone.

"Now, to my mind," said Tonson, "saving your presence, Master Dickons, I know not but young madam be more to my taste; she be in a manner somewhat fuller—plumper-like, and her skin be *so* white, and her hair as black as a raven's.

"There's not another two such women to be found in the whole world," said Dickons authoritatively. Here Hector suddenly rose up, and went to the door, where he stood snuffing in an inquisitive manner.

"Now, what do that dog hear, I wonder?" quoth Pumpkin curiously, stooping forward.

"Blind Bess," replied Tonson, winking his eye, and laughing. Presently there was a sharp rapping at the door; which the landlord opened, and let in one of the servants from the Hall, his clothes white with snow, his face nearly as white, with manifest agitation. "Why, man, what's the matter?" inquired Dickons, startled by the man's appearance. "Art frightened at anything?" "Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" he commenced. "What is it, man? Art drunk?—or mad?—or frightened? Take a drop o' drink," said Tonson. But the man refused it.

"Oh, my friends, sad work at the Hall!"

"What's the matter?" cried all at once, rising and standing round the new comer. "If thou be'st drunk, John," said Dickons sternly, "there's a way of sobering thee—mind that." "Oh, Master Dickons, I don't know what's come to me, for grief and fright! The Squire, they do say, and all of us are to be turned out o' Yatton!" "*What!*" exclaimed all in a breath.

"There's some one else lays claim to it. We must all go! Oh, Lud? oh, Lud!" No one spoke for near a minute; and consternation was written on every face.

"Sit thee down here, John," said Dickons at length, "and let us hear what thou hast to say—or thou wilt have us all be going up in a body to the Hall."

Having forced on him part of a glass of ale, he began,—“There hath been plainly mischief brewing, *somewhere*, this many days, as I could tell by the troubled face o' the Squire; but he kept it to himself. Dawyer Parkinson and another have been latterly coming in chaises from London; and last night the Squire got a letter that seems to have finished all. Such trouble there

were last night with the Squire, and young madam and miss! And to-day the Parson came, and were a long while alone with old Madam Aubrey, who hath since had a stroke, or a fit, or something of that like (the doctors have been there all day from Grilston), and likewise young madam hath taken to her bed, and is ill."

"And what of the Squire and miss?" inquired some one, after all had maintained a long silence.

"Oh, 'twould break your heart to see them," said the man, bursting into tears; "they are both as pale as death: he so dreadful sorrowful, but quiet, like, and she now and then wringing her hands, and both of them going from the bed-room of old madam to young madam's. Nay, an' there had been half-a-dozen deaths i' t' house, it could not be worse. Neither the Squire nor miss hath touched food the whole day!"

There was, in truth, not a dry eye in the room, nor one whose voice did not seem somewhat obstructed with his emotions.

"Who told thee about the Squire's losing the estate?" inquired Dickens.

"We heard of it but an hour or so, agone. Mr. Parkinson (it seems by the Squire's orders) told Mr. Waters, and he told it to us: saying as how it was useless to keep such a thing secret, and that we might all know the occasion of so much trouble." "Who's to ha' it then, instead of the Squire?" at length inquired Tomson, in a voice half choked with rage and grief. "Lord only knows at present. But whoever 'tis, there isn't one of us sarvants but will go with the squire and his—if it be even to prison, *that* I can tell ye."

"I'm Squire *Aubrey's* gamekeeper," quoth Tonson, his eye kindling as his countenance darkened, "and no one's else! It shall go hard if any one else here hath a game——" "But if there's law in the land, sure the justice must be wi' t' Squire—he and his family have had it so long," said one of the farmers.

"I'll tell you what, masters," said Pumpkin, mysteriously, "I shall be somewhat better pleased when Jonas here hath got that old creature Bess safe underground." "Blind Bess?" exclaimed Tonson, with a very serious, not to say disturbed, countenance. "I wonder—sure! sure! that ould witch can have had no hand in all this——" "Poor old soul, not she! There be no such things as witches now-a-days," exclaimed Jonas. "Not she, I warrant me! She hath ever been befriended by the Squire's family. *She* do it!" "The sooner we get her underground, for all that, the better, say I!" quoth Tonson, striking his hand on the table.

"The Parson hath a choice sermon on 'The Flying Away of Riches,'" said Higgs, in a quaint, sad manner; "'tis to be hoped he'll preach from it next Sunday."

Soon after this the little party each dispersed, oppressed with greater grief and amazement than he had ever known before. Bad news fly swiftly—and that which had just come from the Hall, within a very few hours of its having been told at the Aubrey Arms, had spread grief and consternation among high and low for many miles round Yatton.

CHAPTER X.

WOULD you have believed it? Notwithstanding all that had happened between Titmouse and Tag-rag, they positively got reconciled to one another—a triumphant result of the astute policy of Mr. Gammon. As soon as he had heard Titmouse's infuriated account of his ignominious expulsion from Satin Lodge,

he burst into a fit of hearty but gentle laughter, which at length subsided into an inward chuckle that lasted the rest of the day; and which was occasioned, first, by gratification at the impression which his own sagacity had evidently produced upon the powerful mind of Titmouse; secondly, by an exquisite appreciation of the mingled meanness and stupidity of Tag-rag. I do not mean it to be understood that Titmouse had given Mr. Gammon such a terse and clear account of the matter as I imagine myself to have given to my reader; but still he told quite enough to put Mr. Gammon in full possession of the true state of the case. Good: but then, instantly reflected Gammon, what are we now to do with Titmouse? Where was that troublesome little ape to be caged, till it suited the purposes of his proprietors (as Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap might surely be called, for they had caught him, however they might fail to tame him) to let him loose upon society, to amuse and astonish it by his antics? That was the question occupying the thoughts of Mr. Gammon, while his calm, clear, grey eye was fixed upon Titmouse, apparently very attentive to what he was saying. That gentleman had first told the story of his wrongs to Snap, who instantly, rubbing his hands, suggested an indictment at the Clerkenwell sessions—an idea which infinitely delighted Titmouse, but was somewhat sternly “pooh-pooh-poohed!” by Mr. Gammon as soon as he heard of it—Snap thereat shrugging his shoulders with a disconcerted air, but a bitter sneer upon his sharp, hard face. Like many men of little but active minds, early drilled to particular callings, Snap was equal to the mechanical conduct of business—the mere working of the machinery—but, as the phrase is, could never see an inch beyond his nose.

To speak after the manner of physiologists, several of my characters—Titmouse, Tag-rag (with his amiable wife and daughter), Huckaback, Snap, and old Quirk himself—may be looked on as reptiles of a low order in the scale of being, whose simple structures almost one dash of the knife would suffice to lay thoroughly open. Gammon, however, I look upon as of a much higher order; possessing a far more complicated structure, adapted to the discharge of superior functions; and who, consequently, requireth a more careful dissection.

Gammon saw that Tag-rag, under proper management, might be made very useful. He was a moneyed man; a selfish man; and, after his sort, an ambitious man. He had an only child, a daughter, and if Titmouse and he could only be by any means once more brought together and a firm friendship cemented between them, Gammon saw several very profitable uses to which such an intimacy might be turned, in the happening of any of the several contingencies which he contemplated as possible. In the event, for instance, of larger outlays of money being required than suited the convenience of the firm, could not Tag-rag be easily brought to accommodate his future son-in-law of £10,000 a-year? Suppose, for instance, that after all their case should break down, and all their pains, exertions, and expenditure be utterly thrown away! Now, if Tag-rag could be quietly brought, some fine day, to the point of either making some actual advance, or entering into security for Titmouse—ah! that would do—that *would* do, said both Quirk and Gammon. But then Titmouse was a very unsafe instrument—an incalculable fool, and might commit himself too far!

“You forget, Gammon,” said old Mr. Quirk, “I don’t fear this girl of Tag-rag’s—because only let Titmouse see—hem,” he suddenly paused, and looked a little confused. “To be sure—I see,” replied Gammon quietly, and the thing passed off. “If either Miss Quirk or Miss Tag-rag becomes Mrs. Titmouse,” thought he, “I am not the man I take myself for.”

A few days after Titmouse’s expulsion from Satin Lodge, without his having ever gone near Tag-rag’s premises in Oxford Street, or, in short, seen or heard anything about him, or any one connected with him, he removed to small

but respectable lodgings in the neighbourhood of Hatton Garden, provided for him by Mr. Quirk. Mrs. Squallop was quite affected while she took leave of Titmouse, who gave her son sixpence to take his two boxes downstairs to the hackney coach drawn up opposite to the entrance to Closet Court.

"I've always felt like a mother towards you, sir, in my humble way," said Mrs. Squallop, in a very respectful manner, and curtsying profoundly. "A—I've not got any small silver by me, my good woman," said Titmouse, with a fine air, as he drew on his white kid glove. "Lord, Mr. Titmouse!" said the woman, almost bursting into tears, "I wasn't asking for money, neither for me nor mine—only one can't help, as it were, feeling at parting with an old lodger, you know, sir—" "Ah—ya—as—and all that! Well, my good woman, good-day, good-day." "Good-bye, sir—God bless you; now you're going to be a rich man!—Excuse me, sir."—And she seized his hand and shook it.

"You're a—devilish—impudent—woman—'pon my soul!" exclaimed Titmouse, his features filled with amazement at the presumption of which she had been guilty; and he strode down the stairs with an air of offended dignity.

"Well—I never!—*That* for you, you little brute," said Mrs. Squallop, snapping her fingers as soon as she had heard his last step on the stairs—"Kind or cruel, 'tis all one to you, you're a nasty jackanapes, only fit to stand in a tailor's window to show his clothes—and I'll be sworn you'll come to no good in the end! Let you be rich as you may, you'll always be the fool you always were!"

The day after that on which Mr. Gammon had had a long interview with Titmouse, at the new lodgings of the latter,—when, after a very skilful effort, he had succeeded in reconciling Titmouse to a renewal of his acquaintance with Tag-rag, upon that gentleman's making a complete and abject apology for his late monstrous conduct, Mr. Gammon wended his way towards Oxford Street, and soon introduced himself once more to Mr. Tag-rag, who was standing leaning against one of the counters in his shop in a musing position, with a pen behind his ear, and his hands in his breeches pockets. Ten days had elapsed since he had expelled the little impostor Titmouse from Satin Lodge, and during that interval he had neither seen nor heard anything whatever of him. On now catching the first glimpse of Mr. Gammon, he started from his musing posture, not a little disconcerted, and agitation overspread his coarse, deeply-pitted face with a tallowy hue. What was in the wind? Mr. Gammon coming to him, so long after what had occurred? Error had discarded Titmouse! Tag-rag had a mortal dread of Gammon, who seemed to him to glide like a dangerous snake into the shop, so quietly, and *so deadly*! There was something so calm and imperturbable in his demeanour, so blandly crafty, so ominously gentle and soft in the tone of his voice, so penetrating in his eye, and he could throw such an infernal smile over his features! Tag-rag might be likened to the ox, suddenly shuddering as he perceives the glistening folds of the rattlesnake noiselessly moving towards, or around him, in the long grass. One glimpse of his blasting beauty of hue, and—Horror! all is over.

If the splendid bubble of Titmouse's fortune *had* burst in the manner which he had represented, why Gammon here now? thought Tag-rag. It was with, in truth, a very poor show of contempt and defiance that, in answer to the bland salutation of Gammon, he led the way down the shop into the little room which had been the scene of such an extraordinary communication concerning Titmouse on a former occasion.

Gammon commenced, in a mild tone, with a very startling representation of the criminal liability which Tag-rag had incurred by his wanton outrage upon Mr. Titmouse, his own guest, in violation of all the laws of hospitality. Tag-rag furiously alleged the imposition which had been practised on him by Titmouse; but seemed quite collapsed when Gammon assured him that that circumstance would not afford him the slightest justification. Having satisfied Tag-rag that

he was entirely at the mercy of Titmouse, who might subject him to both fine and imprisonment, Mr. Gammon proceeded to open his eyes to their widest stare of amazement by assuring him that Titmouse had been hoaxing him, and that he was really in the dazzling position in which he had been first represented by Gammon to Tag-rag; that every week brought him nearer to the full and uncontrolled enjoyment of an estate in Yorkshire, worth £10,000 a year at the very lowest; that it was becoming an object of increasing anxiety to them (Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap) to keep him out of the hands of money-lenders, who, as usual, in such cases, had already scented out their victim, and so forth.—Tag-rag turned very white, and felt sick at heart in the midst of all his wonder. Oh, and his daughter had lost the golden prize! and through *his* misconduct! He could have sunk into the cellar!—Mr. Gammon declared that he could not account for the singular conduct of Mr. Titmouse on the melancholy occasion in question, except by referring it to the excellent wines which he had too freely partaken of at Satin Lodge, added (said Gammon, with an exquisite expression of features that perfectly fascinated Tag-rag) to a “certain tenderer influence,” which had fairly laid prostrate the faculties of the young and enthusiastic Titmouse; that there could be no doubt of his real motive in the conduct alluded to, namely, a desire to test the sincerity and disinterestedness of a “certain person’s” attachment, before he let all his fond and passionate feelings go out towards her—[At this point the perspiration burst from every pore in the body of Tag-rag]—and that no one could deplore the unexpected issue of his little experiment so much as now did Titmouse.

Tag-rag really, for a moment, scarcely knew where he was, who was with him, nor whether he stood on his head or his heels, so delightful and entirely unexpected was the issue of Mr. Gammon’s visit. As soon as his faculties had somewhat recovered themselves from their temporary confusion, almost breathless, he assured Gammon that no event in the whole course of his life had occasioned him such poignant regret as his treatment of Titmouse on the occasion in question; that he had undoubtedly followed unwittingly (he was ashamed to own) the example of Titmouse, and drunk far more than his usual quantity of wine; besides which he had undoubtedly noticed, as had Mrs. T., the state of things between Mr. Titmouse and his daughter,—talking of whom, by the way, he could assure Mr. Gammon that they had both been ill ever since that unfortunate evening, and had never ceased to condemn his—Tag-rag’s—monstrous conduct on that occasion. As for his daughter, she was growing thinner and thinner every day, and he thought he must send her to the country for a short time; in fact—poor girl!—she was plainly pining away!

To all this Mr. Gammon listened with a calm, delightful, sympathizing look, that quite transported Tag-rag, and satisfied him that Mr. Gammon implicitly believed every word that was being said to him. But when he proceeded to assure Tag-rag that this visit of his had been undertaken at the earnest instance of Mr. Titmouse himself (who, by the way, had removed to lodgings which would do for the present, so as they were only near to their office, for the purpose of frequent communication on matters of business between him and their firm), who had urged him, Mr. Gammon, to tender the olive branch, in the devout hope that it might be accepted. Tag-rag’s excitement knew scarce any bounds; and he could almost have started into the shop, and given orders to his shopmen to sell every article, for the rest of the day, one and a half per cent. under what they had been selling before! Mr. Gammon wrote down Titmouse’s direction, and assured Mr. Tag-rag that a call from him would be gratefully received by Mr. Titmouse. “There’s no accounting for these things, Mr. Tag-rag—is there?” said Mr. Gammon, with an arch smile, as he prepared to depart—Tag-rag squeezing his hands with painful energy as

Gammon bade him adieu, saying he should not be himself for the rest of the day, and bowing the aforesaid Mr. Gammon down the shop with as profound an obsequiousness as if he had been the Lord High Chancellor, or even the Lord Mayor. As soon as Gammon had got fairly into the street, and to a safe distance, he burst into little gentle paroxysms of laughter, every now and then, that lasted him till he had regained his office in Saffron Hill.

The motive so boldly and skilfully suggested by Gammon to Tag-rag, as that impelling Titmouse to seek a reconciliation with him, was greedily credited by Tag-rag. 'Tis certainly very easy for a man to believe what he wishes to be true. Was it *very* improbable that Tag-rag, loving only one object on earth (next to money, which indeed he really did love with the best and holiest energies of his nature), namely, his daughter; and believing her to be possessed of qualities calculated to excite every one's love—should believe that she had inspired Titmouse with the passion of which he had just been hearing—a passion that was consuming him, that could not be quenched by even the gross outrage which—but laugh! *that* Tag-rag shuddered to think of. He clapped his hat on his head, and started off to Titmouse's lodgings, and fortunately caught that gentleman just as he was going out to dine at a neighbouring tavern. If Tag-rag had been a keen observer, he could hardly have failed to discover aversion towards himself written in every feature and gesture of Titmouse; and also how difficult it was to be concealed. But his eagerness overbore everything; and took Titmouse quite by storm. Before Tag-rag had done with him, he had obliterated every trace of resentment in his little friend's bosom. Thoroughly as Gammon thought he had prepared him for the encounter, and armed him at all points—'twas of no avail. Tag-rag poured such a monstrous quantity of flummery down the gaping mouth and insatiate throat of the little animal, as at length produced its desired effect. Titmouse would have dined at Satin Lodge on the very next Sunday, in accordance with the pressing invitations of Tag-rag, but that he happened to recollect having engaged himself to dine that evening with Mr. Quirk, at his residence in Camberwell—Alibi House. Mr. Tag-rag looked rather blank at hearing of the grand party there was to be at Alibi House, and that Titmouse was to be introduced to the only daughter of Mr. Quirk, and could not, for the life of him, abstain from dropping something, vague and indistinct to be sure, about "entrapping unsuspecting innocence," and "interested attentions," and other similar expressions—all of which, however, were lost upon Titmouse. Tapping with an auctioneer's hammer on a block of granite, would make about as much impression upon it as hint, innuendo, or suggestion, upon a blockhead. So it was with Titmouse. He promised to dine at Satin Lodge on the Sunday after, with which poor Mr. Tag-rag was obliged to depart content; having been unable to get Titmouse up to Clapham on either of the intervening evenings, on which, he told Mr. Tag-rag, he was particularly engaged with an intimate friend—in fact, one of his solicitors; and Tag-rag left him, after shaking him by the hand with the utmost cordiality and energy. He instantly conceived a lively hatred of old Mr. Quirk and his daughter, who seemed taking so unfair an advantage.

The gentleman to whom Titmouse alluded was, in fact, Mr. Snap, who had early evinced a great partiality for him, and lost no opportunity of contributing to his enjoyment. He was a sharp-sighted person, and quickly detected many qualities in Titmouse kindred to his own. He sincerely commiserated Titmouse's situation, than which what could be more lonely and desolate? Was he to sit night after night, in the lengthening nights of autumn and winter, with not a soul to speak to, not a book to read (that was at least interesting or worth reading); nothing, in short, to occupy his attention? "No," said Snap to himself; "I will do as I would be done by; I will come and draw

him out of his dull hole; I will show him life—I will give him an early insight into the habits and practices of the great world, in which he is so soon to cut a leading figure? I will early familiarize him with the gayest and most exciting modes of London life!" The very first taste of this cup of pleasure was exquisitely relished by Titmouse; and he felt a proportionate gratitude to him whose kind hand had first raised it to his lips. Scenes of which he had heretofore only heard and read—after which he had often sighed and yearned—were now opening daily before him, limited as were his means; and he felt perfectly happy. When Snap had finished the day's labours of the office, from which he was generally released about eight or nine o'clock in the evening, he would repair to his lodgings, and decorate himself for the evening's display; after which either he would go to Titmouse, or Titmouse come to him, as might have been previously agreed upon between them; and then,—“The town was all before them, where to choose.”

Sometimes they would, arm in arm, each with his cigar in his mouth, saunter for hours together along the leading streets and thoroughfares, making acute observations and deep reflections upon the ever-moving and motley scenes around them. Most frequently, however, they would repair, at half-price, to the theatres; for Snap had the means of securing almost a constant supply of “orders” from the underlings of the theatres, and also in respect to the *Sunday Flash*, with which Messrs. Quirk and Gammon were connected, and other newspapers. Ah, 'twas a glorious sight to see these two gentlemen saunter into a vacant box, conscious that the eyes of two-thirds of the house were fixed upon them in admiration, and conducting themselves accordingly—as swells of the first water! One such night counterbalanced, in Titmouse's estimation, a whole year of his previous obscurity and wretchedness! The theatre over, they would repair to some cloudy tavern, full of noise and smoke, and the glare of gaslight—redolent of the fragrant fumes of tobacco, spirits, and porter, intermingled with the tempting odours of smoking kidneys, mutton-chops, beef-steaks, oysters, stewed cheese, toasted cheese, Welsh rabbits; where those who are chained to the desk and the counter during the day, revel in the license of the hour, and eat, and drink, and smoke to the highest point either of excitement or stupefaction, and enter into all the slang of the day—of the turf, the ring, the cockpit, the theatres, and shake their sides at comic songs. To enter one of these places when the theatre was over, was a luxury indeed to Titmouse; figged out in his very uttermost best, with satin stock and double breast-pins; his glossy hat cocked on one side of his head, his tight blue surtout, with the snowy handkerchief elegantly drooping out of the breast pocket; straw-coloured kid gloves, tight trousers, and shining boots; his ebony silver-headed cane held carelessly under his arm: to walk into the middle of the room with a sort of haughty ease and indifference, or nonchalance; and after deliberately scanning, through his eyeglass, every box, with its occupants, at length drop into a vacant nook, and with a languid air summon the bustling waiter to receive his commands. The circumstance of his almost always accompanying Snap on these occasions, who was held in great awe by the waiters, to whom his professional celebrity was well known (for there was scarce an interesting, a dreadful, or a nasty scene at any of the police-offices, in which Snap's name did not figure in the newspapers as “on behalf of the prisoners”), got Titmouse almost an equal share of consideration, and aided the effect produced by his own commanding appearance. As for Snap, whenever he was asked who his companion was, he would whisper in a very significant tone and manner,—“Devilish high chap!”

From these places they would repair, not unfrequently, to certain other scenes of nightly London life, which, I thank God! the virtuous reader can form no notion of, though they are, strange to say, winked at, if not patronized

by the police and magistracy, till the metropolis is choked with them. Thus would Snap and Titmouse pleasantly pass away their time till one, two, three, and often four o'clock in the morning; at which hours they would, with many yawns, skulk homewards through the deserted and silent streets, their clothes redolent with tobacco smoke, their stomachs overcharged, their heads often muddled, swimming, and throbbing with their multifarious potations—having thus spent a “*jolly night*” and “*seen life*.” ’Twas thus that Snap greatly endeared himself to Titmouse, and secretly (for he enjoined upon Titmouse, as the condition of their continuance, strict secrecy on the subject of these nocturnal adventures) stole a march upon his older competitors for the good opinion of Titmouse—Messrs. Quirk, Tag-rag, and even the astute and experienced Gammon himself. Such doings as these required, however, as may easily be believed, some slight augmentations of the allowance made to Titmouse by Messrs. Quirk and Gammon; and ’twas fortunate that Snap was in a condition, having a few hundreds at his command, to supply the necessities of Titmouse, receiving with a careless air, on the occasion of such advances, small slips of paper by way of acknowledgments; some on stamped paper, others on unstamped paper—promissory-notes and I. O. U.’s. Inasmuch, however, as Snap was not always possessed of a stamp on the occasion of a sudden advance, and having asked the opinion of his pleader (a sharp fellow who had been articulated at the same time as himself to Messrs. Quirk and Gammon) as to whether an instrument in this form—“I. O. U. so much—*with interest*,” would be available without a stamp, and being informed that it was a very doubtful point, Snap ingeniously met the difficulty by quietly adding to the principal what might become due in respect of interest: *e.g.*, if £5 were lent, the acknowledgment would stand for £15—these little slips of paper being generally signed by Titmouse in moments of extreme exhilaration, when he never thought of scrutinizing anything that his friend Snap would lay before him. For the honour of Snap, I must say that I hardly think he deliberately purposed to perpetrate the fraud which such a transaction appears to amount to; all he wanted was—so he satisfied himself at least—to have it in his power to recover the full amount of principal *really* advanced, with interest, on one or other of these various securities, and hold the surplus as trustee for Titmouse. If, for instance, any unfortunate difference should hereafter arise between himself and Titmouse, and he should refuse to recognise his pecuniary obligations to Snap, the latter gentleman would be provided with short and easy proofs of his demands against him. ’Twas thus, I say, that Snap rendered himself indispensable to Titmouse, whom he bound to him by every tie of gratitude; so that, in short, they became sworn friends.

I will always say for Gammon, that he strenuously endeavoured, from whatever motive, to urge upon Titmouse the necessity of his acquiring, at all events, a smattering of the elements of useful education. Beyond an acquaintance with the petty operations of arithmetic requisite for counter-transactions, I will venture to say that poor Titmouse had no serviceable knowledge of any kind. Mr. Gammon repeatedly pressed him to put himself under competent teachers of the ordinary branches of education; but Titmouse as often evaded him, and at length flatly refused to do anything of the kind. He promised, however, to read such books as Mr. Gammon might recommend, who thereupon sent him several: but a book before Titmouse was much the same as a plate of saw-dust before a hungry man. Mr. Gammon, himself a man of considerable acquirements, soon saw the true state of the case, and gave up his attempts in despair and disgust. Not that he ever suffered Titmouse to perceive the faintest indication of such feelings towards him; on the contrary, Gammon ever manifested the same bland and benignant demeanour, consulting his wishes in everything, and striving to instil into him feelings of love, tempered by respect,

as towards the most powerful—the only real, disinterested friend he had: and to a very great extent he succeeded.

Titmouse spent several hours in preparing for an effective first appearance at the dinner-table at Alibi House. Since dining at Satin Lodge, he had considerably increased his wardrobe both in quantity and style. He now sported a pair of tight black trousers, with pumps and gossamer silk stockings. He wore a crimson velvet waistcoat, with a bright blue satin under-waistcoat, a shirt-frill standing out somewhat fiercely at right angles with his breast, and a brown dress-coat cut in the extreme of the fashion, the long tails coming to a point just about the backs of his knees. His hair (its purple hue still pretty distinctly perceptible) was disposed with great elegance. He had discarded moustaches; but had a very promising imperial. The hair underneath his chin came out curling on each side of it, above his stock, like two little tufts or horns. Over his waistcoat he wore his mosaic gold watch-guard, and a broad black watered riband, to which was attached his eyeglass—in fact, if he had dressed himself in order to sit to a miniature painter for his likeness, he could not have taken greater pains, or secured a more successful result. The only points about his appearance with which he was at all dissatisfied, were his hair—which was not yet the thing which he hoped in due time to see it—his thick red stumpy hands, and his round shoulders. The last matter gave him considerable concern, for he felt that it seriously interfered with a graceful carriage; and that the defect in his figure had been, after all, not in the least remedied by the prodigious padding of his coat. His protuberant eyes, of very light hue, had an expression that entirely harmonized with that of his open mouth; and both together—quite independently of his dress, carriage, and demeanour—(there is nothing like being candid)—gave you the image of a—complete fool. Having at length carefully adjusted his hat on his head, and drawn on his white kid gloves, he enveloped himself in a stylish cloak, with long black silk tassels, which had been lent to him by Snap; and about four o'clock, forth sallied Mr. Titmouse, carefully picking his way, in quest of the first coach that could convey him to Alibi House, or as near to it as might be. He soon found one, and, conscious that his appearance was far too splendid for an outside place, got inside. All the way along, his heart was in a little flutter of vanity, excitement, and expectation. He was going to be introduced to Miss Quirk—and probably, also, to several people of great consequence—as the heir-apparent of £10,000 a-year! Two very respectable female passengers, his companions all the way, he never once deigned to interchange a syllable with. Four or five times did he put his head out of the window, calling out, in a loud peremptory tone—"Mind, coachman,—Alibi House—Mr. Quirk's—Alibi House—Do you hear, demme?" After which he would sink back into the seat with a magnificent air, as if he had not been used to give himself so much trouble. The coach at length stopped. "Hallibi Ouse, sir," said the coachman, in a most respectful tone—"this is Mr. Quirk's, sir." Titmouse stepped out, dropped eighteenpence into the man's hand, and, opening the gate, found himself in a straight and narrow gravel walk, of about twenty yards in length, with little obstinate-looking stunted shrubs on each side. 'Twas generally known, among Mr. Quirk's friends, by the name of the *Rope-walk*. Titmouse might have entered before as fine-looking a house, but only to deliver a bundle of drapery or hosiery; never before had he entered such a one as a guest. It was, in fact, a fair-sized house, at least treble that of Satin Lodge, and had a far more stylish appearance. When Titmouse pulled the bell, the door was quickly plucked open by a big footman, with showy shoulder-knot and a pair of splendid red plush breeches, who soon disposed of Titmouse's cloak and hat, and led the way to his friend, with a sudden palpit-

tion of the heart, had had a moment's time even to run his hands through his hair.

"Your name, sir?" inquired the man, suddenly pausing—with his hand upon the handle of the door. "Mr. Titmouse." "I—*beg* your pardon, sir; *what* name?"

Titmouse, clearing his throat, repeated his name—open went the door, and—"Mr. Ticklemouse," said the servant very loudly and distinctly, ushering in Titmouse; on whom the door was the next instant closed. He felt amazingly flustered; and he would have been still more so, if he could have been made aware of the titter which pervaded the fourteen or twenty people assembled in the room, occasioned by the droll misnomer of the servant, and the exquisitely ridiculous appearance of poor Titmouse. Mr. Quirk, dressed in black, with knee breeches and silk stockings, immediately bustled up to him, shook him cordially by the hand, and led him up to the assembled guests. "My daughter, Miss Quirk; Mrs. Alderman Addlehead, Mrs. Deputy Diddle-daddle, Mrs. Alias, my sister; Mr. Alderman Addlehead, Mr. Deputy Diddle-daddle, Mr. Bluster, Mr. Slang, Mr. Hug, Mr. Flaw, Mr. Viper, Mr. Ghastly, Mr. Gammon you know." Miss Quirk was about four or five-and-twenty, a fat young lady, with flaxen hair curled formally all over her head and down to her shoulders, so that she very much resembled one of those great wax dolls seen in bazaars and shop windows, especially if looked at through a strong magnifying glass. Her complexion was beautifully fair; her eyes small; her face quite round and fat. From the die-away manner in which she moved her head, and the languid tone of her voice, it was obvious that she was a very sentimental young lady. She was dressed in white, and wore a massive gold chain, her fat arms being half covered with long kid gloves. She was sitting on the sofa, from which she did not rise when Titmouse was introduced to her, and the moment after hid her face behind the album which had been lying on her knee, and which she had been showing to the ladies on each side of her; for, in fact, neither she nor any one else could, without the greatest difficulty, refrain from laughing at the monkeyfied appearance of Titmouse. The Alderman was a stout, stupid, little man—a fussy old prig—with small angry-looking black eyes, and a short red nose: as for his head, it seemed as though he had just smeared some sticky fluid over it, and then dipped it into a flour-tub, so thickly laden was it with powder. Mr. Deputy Diddle-daddle was tall and thin, and serious and slow of speech, with the solemn composure of an undertaker. Mr. Bluster was a great Old Bailey barrister, about fifty years old, the leader constantly employed by Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and was making at least a thousand a-year. He had an amazingly truculent-looking countenance, coarse to a degree, and his voice matched it; but on occasions like the present—*i.e.*, in elegant society—he would fain drop the successful terrors of his manner, and appear the mild, dignified gentleman. He therefore spoke in a very soft, cringing way, with an anxious smile; but his bold insolent eye and coarse mouth, what could disguise or mitigate their expression. Here he was, playing the great man; making himself, however, most particularly agreeable to Messrs. Quirk and Gammon. Slang was of the same school—fat, vulgar, confident, and empty; telling obscene jokes and stories in a deep bass voice. He sang a good song, too—particularly of that class which required the absence of ladies—and of *gentlemen*. Hug (Mr. Toady Hug) was also a barrister; a glib little Jewish-looking fellow, creeping into considerable criminal practice. He was a sneaking back-biter, and had a blood-hound scent after an attorney. See him, for instance, at this moment, in close and eager conversation with Mr. Flaw, who, rely upon it, will give him a brief before the week is over. Viper was the editor of the *Sunday Flash*; a cold, venomous, little fellow. He was of opinion that everything was wrong—moral, physical, intellectual, and social; that there was really

no such thing, or at least ought not to be, as religion; and, as to political rights, that everybody ought to be uppermost at once. He had failed in business twice, and disreputably; then had become an Unitarian parson; but, having seduced a young female member of his congregation, he was expelled from his pulpit. An action being brought against him by the mother of his victim, and heavy damages obtained, he attempted to take the benefit of the Insolvent Debtors' Act; but, on account of Miss —, was remanded for eighteen months. That period he employed in writing a shockingly blasphemous work, for which he was prosecuted, and sentenced to a heavy fine and imprisonment; on being released from which, saturated with gall and bitterness against all mankind, he took to political writing of a very violent character, and was at length picked up, half starved, by his present patron, Mr. Quirk, and made editor of the *Sunday Flash*. Is not all this history written in his sallow, sinister-eyed, bitter-expressed countenance? Woe to him who gets into a discussion with Viper! There were one or two others present, particularly a Mr. Ghastly, a third-rate tragic actor, with a tremendous mouth, only one eye, and a very hungry look. He never spoke, because no one spoke to him, for his clothes seemed rather rusty-black. The only man of gentlemanlike appearance in the room was Mr. Gammon; and he took an early opportunity of engaging poor Titmouse in conversation, and setting him comparatively at his ease—a thing which was attempted by old Quirk, but in such a fidgety-fussy way as served only to fluster Titmouse the more.

Mr. Quirk gave a dinner party of this sort regularly every Sunday; and they formed the happiest moments of his life—occasions on which he banished from his thoughts the responsible anxieties of his profession, and, surrounded by a select circle of choice spirits, such as were thus collected together, partook joyously of the “Feast of reason, and the flow of soul.” “This is a very beautiful picture, Titmouse, isn’t it?” said Gammon, leading him to the further corner of the drawing-room, where hung a small picture with a sort of curtain of black gauze before it, which Gammon lifting up, Titmouse beheld a picture of a man suspended from the gallows, his hands tied with cords before him, his head forced aside, and covered down to the chin with a white nightcap. ’Twas done with sickening fidelity, and Titmouse gazed at it with a shudder. “Charming thing, isn’t it?” said Gammon with a very expressive smile. “Y—e—e—s,” replied Titmouse, his eyes glued to the horrid object.

“Very striking, a’n’t it?” quoth Quirk, bustling up to them; “’twas painted for me by a first-rate artist, whose brother I very nearly saved from the gallows! Like such things?” he inquired with a matter-of-fact air, drawing down the black gauze. “Yes, sir, uncommon—most uncommon.” “Well, I’ll show you something *very* interesting! Heard of Gilderoy, that was hanged last year for forgery? Gad, my daughter’s got a brooch with a lock of his hair in it, which he gave me himself—a client of mine: within an ace of getting him off—flaw in the indictment—found it out myself—did, by gad! Come along, and I’ll get Dora to show it to you!” and, putting Titmouse’s arm in his, he led him up to the interesting young lady.

“Dora, just show my friend Titmouse that brooch of yours, with Gilderoy’s hair.”

“Oh, my dear papa, ’tis such a melancholy thing!” said she, at the same time detaching it from her dress, and handing it to her papa, who, holding it in his hands, gave Titmouse, and one or two others who stood beside, a very interesting account of the last hours of the deceased Gilderoy.

“He was *very* handsome, papa, wasn’t he?” inquired Miss Quirk with a sigh, and a very pensive air. “Wasn’t bad-looking; but good looks and the condemned cell don’t long agree together.” “Ah, papa!” exclaimed Miss Quirk in a mournful tone, and, leaning back in the sofa, raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

"You are too sensitive, my love!" whispered her aunt, Mrs. Alias, squeezing the hand of her niece, who, struggling against her feelings, presently revived.

"We were looking just now," said Mr. Hug, addressing Mr. Quirk, "at a very interesting addition to Miss Quirk's album—that letter of Grizzlegut." "Ah, very striking! Value it beyond everything! Shall never forget Grizzlegut! Very nearly got off! 'Twas an 'etc.' that nearly saved his life, through being omitted in the indictment. 'Fore gad, we thought we'd got 'em!"

They were alluding to an autograph letter which had been addressed to Mr. Quirk by Grizzlegut (who had been executed for high treason a few weeks before), the night before he suffered. He was a blood-stained scoundrel of the deepest dye, and ought to have been hanged and quartered half-a-dozen times.

"Will you read it aloud, Mr. Hug?" inquired Miss Quirk; and the barrister, in a somewhat pompous tone, read the following memorable document:—

*"Condemned Cell, Newgate,
"Friday night, half-past 11 o'clock,
"1st May, 18—.*

"SIR,

"At this awful moment, when this world is closing rapidly upon me and my fellow-sufferers, and the sounds of the wretches putting up the grim gallows are audible to my listening ears, and on the morrow the most horrible death that malicious tyrants can inflict awaits me, my soul being calm and full of fortitude, and beating responsive to the call of GLORIOUS LIBERTY, I feel prouder than the king upon his throne. I feel that I have done much to secure the liberties of my *injured country*.

'For Liberty, glorious Liberty,
Who'd fear to die?'

Many thanks to you, sir, for your truly indefatigable efforts on my behalf, and the constant exercise of a skill that nearly secured us a glorious acquittal. What a flame we would have raised in England! That should have blasted the enemies of true freedom. I go to hereafter (if, indeed, there be a hereafter), as we shall soon know, not with my soul crammed with priestcraft, but a bold Briton, having laid down my life for my country, knowing that future ages will do me justice. Adieu, tyrants, adieu! Do your worst!! My soul defies you!!! I am, Sir, your humble, obliged, and undismayed servant,

"ARTHUR GRIZZLEGUT.

"TO CALEB QUIRK, ESQ.

'Tyrants grim
Will on the morrow cut me limb from limb,
While Liberty looks on with terrible eye,
And says, *I will avenge him by-and-by.*'

"ARTHUR GRIZZLEGUT."

The reading of the above produced a great sensation. "That man's name will be enrolled among the Sidneys and the Hampdens of his country!" said Viper, with a grim and excited air. "That letter deserves to be carved on a golden tablet! The last four lines are sublime! He was a martyr to principles that are silently and rapidly making their way in this country."—How much further he would have gone on in this strain, seeing no one present had resolution enough to differ with or interrupt him, even if he had been so disposed, I know not; but fortunately dinner was announced—a sound which startled old Quirk out of a posture of intense attention to Viper, and evident admiration

of his sentiments. He gave his arm with an air of prodigious politeness to the gaunt Mrs. Alderman Addlehead, whose distinguished lord led down Miss Quirk—and the rest followed in no particular order—Titmouse arm in arm with Gammon, who took care to place him next to himself (Gammon). It was really a dashing sort of dinner. Quirk had, indeed, long been celebrated for his Sunday dinners. Titmouse had never seen anything like it; and was quite bewildered—particularly at the number of differently shaped and coloured glasses, etc., etc., etc., placed opposite to him. He kept a constant eye on the movements of Gammon, and did whatever he did, as if the two had been moved by the same set of springs, and was thus saved innumerable embarrassments and annoyances. For a considerable while Titmouse was too much flurried to enjoy himself; but a few glasses of champagne succeeded in elevating his spirits to the proper pitch—and would soon have driven them far beyond it. Almost everybody, except the great folk at the top of the table, asked him to take wine; and he constantly filled his glass. In fact Gammon, recollecting a scene at his own chamber, soon perceived that, unless he interfered, Titmouse would be drunk long before dinner was over. He had not imagined the earth to contain so exquisite a drink as champagne; and he could have fallen down and worshipped it, as it came fizzing and flashing out of the bottle. Gammon earnestly assured him that he would be ill if he drunk so much—that many eyes were upon him—and that it was not the custom to do more than merely sip from his wine-glass when challenging or challenged. But Titmouse had taken a considerably greater quantity on board, before Gammon thus interfered, than that gentleman was aware of, and began to get very voluble. Guess the progress he had made, when he called out with a confident air—“Mr. Alderman! Your health!”—whether more to that great man’s astonishment or disgust I cannot undertake to say: but after a steady stare for a moment or two at Titmouse, “Oh! I shall be very happy, indeed, *Mr. Gammon*,” he called out, looking at the latter gentleman, and drinking with *him*. That signified nothing, however, to Titmouse, who, indeed, did not see anything at all pointed or unusual, and gulped down his wine as eagerly as before.

“Cool puppy, that, Miss Quirk, must say,” snuffled the offended Alderman to Miss Quirk.

“He’s young, dear Mr. Alderman,” said she, sweetly and mildly—“and when you consider the immense fortune he is coming into—ten thousand a-year my papa says——” “That don’t make him less a puppy—nor a brute,” interrupted the ruffled Alderman, still more indignant; for his own forty thousand pounds, the source of all his social eminence, sunk into insignificance at the sound of the splendid income just about to drop into the lap of Titmouse. Mr. Bluster, who headed the table on Miss Quirk’s left-hand side, and who felt that he *ought* to be, but knew that in the presence of the Alderman he *was* not, the great man of the day, observing the irritation under which his rival was suffering, immediately raised his threatening double-glasses to his eyes, and in a tone of ostentatious condescension, looking down the table to Titmouse, called out, “Mr. Titmarsh—may I have the honour of drinking wine with you?”

“Ya—as, brother Bumptious,” replied Titmouse, who could never bear to hear his name mis-pronounced, and he raised *his* glass to his eye; “was just going to ask *you*!” All this was done in such a loud and impudent tone and manner, as made Gammon still more uneasy for his young companion. But his sally had been received by the company as a very smart retort, and produced a roar of laughter, every one being glad to see Mr. Bluster snubbed, who bore it in silent dignity, though his face showed his chagrin and astonishment; and he very heartily agreed, for once in his life, with the worshipful person opposite to him in his estimate of our friend Titmouse.

"Mr. Titmouse! Mr. Titmouse! my daughter wonders you won't take wine with her," said Mr. Quirk in a low tone—"will you join us? we're going to take a glass of champagne." "Oh! 'pon my life delighted"—quoth Titmouse. "Dora, my dear! Mr. Titmouse will take wine with you?—Jack" (to the servant), "fill Miss Quirk's and Mr. Titmouse's glasses to the brim." "Oh no! dearest papa." "Pho! pho!—nonsense—the first time of asking, you know, ah, ha!"

"Well! If it *must* be," and with what a graceful inclination—with what a sly searching glance, and fascinating smile, did she exchange courtesies with Titmouse! He felt disposed to take wine with her a second time immediately; but Gammon restrained him. Mr. Toady Hug, having become acquainted with the brilliant prospects of Titmouse, earnestly desired to exert his little talents to do the agreeable, and ingratiate himself with Mr. Titmouse; but there was a counteracting force in another direction, the attorney, Mr. Flaw, who had the greatest practice at the Clerkenwell sessions, sat beside him, and received his most respectful and incessant attentions; Hug speaking ever to him in a low confidential whisper, constantly casting a furtive glance towards Bluster and Slang, to see whether they were observing him.

"How *could* Gobble have lost that verdict? I assure you I would have bet ten to one on your getting a verdict; for I read over your brief as it lay beside me, and upon my honour, Mr. Flaw, it was most admirably got up. Everything depends on the brief——"

"Glad you thought so, sir," replied Flaw, wondering how it was that he had never before thought of giving a brief to Mr. Hug.

"You've heard of Aaron Doodle, who was committed for that burglary at ——? Well, I defend him, and shall be happy to give you the brief. Do you lead Mr. Dolt?" Hug nodded. "Then he will be your junior. Where are your chambers, Mr. Hug?" "No. 4, Cant Court, Gray's Inn. When, my dear sir, does the case come on?" "Thursday—perhaps Wednesday." "Then *do* come and breakfast with me, and we can talk it over, you know, so nicely together."

"Sir, you're *very* polite. I will do myself the pleasure—" replied Mr. Flaw—and took wine with Mr. Hug.

This little stroke of business over, the disengaged couple were at liberty to attend to the general conversation of the table. Mr. Bluster and Mr. Slang kept the company in almost a constant roar, with descriptions of scenes in court, in which *they* had, of course, been the principal actors; and according to their own accounts they must be wonderful fellows. Such botherers of judges!—Such bafflers and brow-beaters of witnesses!—Such bamboozlers of juries!

You should have seen the sneering countenance of Hug all the while. He never once smiled or laughed at the brilliant sallies of his brethren, and did his best to prevent his new patron, Mr. Flaw, from doing so—constantly putting his hand before his mouth, and whispering into Mr. Flaw's ear at the very point of the joke or story—and the smile would disappear from the countenance of Mr. Flaw.

The alderman laughed till the tears ran out of his little eyes, which he constantly wiped with his napkin. Amidst the general laughter and excitement, Miss Quirk, leaning her chin on her hand, her elbow resting on the table, several times directed soft, languishing looks towards Titmouse, unobserved by any one but himself; and they were not entirely unsuccessful, although Titmouse was wonderfully taken with the stories of the two counsellors, and believed them to be two of the greatest men he had ever seen or heard of, and at the head of their profession.

"'Pon my soul—I hope, sir, you'll have those two gents in *my* case?" said he earnestly to Gammon. "Unfortunately, your case will not come on in their

courts," said Gammon, with a very expressive smile. "Why, can't it come on where I choose?—or when you like?" inquired Titmouse surprisedly.

Mr. Quirk had been soured during the whole of dinner, for he had anxiously desired to have Titmouse sit beside him at the bottom of the table; but in the little hubbub attendant upon coming down to dinner and taking places, Titmouse slipped out of sight for a minute; and when all were placed, Quirk's enraged eye perceived him seated in the middle of the table, besides Gammon. Gammon *always* got hold of Titmouse. Old Quirk could have flung a decanter at his head.—In his own house!—at his own table! Always anticipating and circumventing him.

"Mr. Quirk, I don't think we've taken a glass of wine together yet, have we?" said Gammon with a bland and cordial manner, at the same time pouring himself out a glass of wine. He perfectly well knew what was annoying his respected partner, whose look of quaint embarrassment, when so suddenly assailed, infinitely amused him. "Catch me asking you here again, Master Gammon," thought Quirk, "the next time that Titmouse dines here!" The reason why Mr. Snap had not been asked was, that Quirk had some slight cause to suspect his having conceived the notion of paying his addresses to Miss Quirk—a thing at any time not particularly palatable to Mr. Quirk; but in the present conjuncture of circumstances quite out of the question, and intolerable even in idea. Snap was not slow in guessing the reason of his exclusion, which had greatly mortified, and also not a little alarmed him. As far as he could venture, he had, during the week, endeavoured to "set" Titmouse "against" Miss Quirk, by such faint disparaging remarks and insinuations as he dared venture upon with so difficult a subject as Titmouse, whom he at the same time inflamed by representations of the splendid matches he might very soon command among the highest women of the land. By these means Snap had, to a certain extent, succeeded; but the few melting glances which had fallen upon Titmouse's sensitive bosom from the eyes of Miss Quirk, were beginning to operate a slight change in his feelings. The old alderman, on an intimation that the "ladies were going to withdraw," laid violent hands on Miss Quirk (he was a "privileged" old fool), and insisted on her singing his favourite song,—*"My Friend and Pitcher."* His request was so warmly seconded by the rest of the company, Titmouse as loud and eager as any, that she was fain to comply. She sung with some sweetness, and much self-possession. She carried Titmouse's feelings along with her from the beginning, as Gammon, who was watching him, perceived.

"Most uncommon lovely gal, isn't she?" whispered Titmouse, with great vivacity. "Very!" replied Gammon drily, with a slight smile. "Shall I call out *encore*? An't that the word? 'Pon my soul, most lovely gal! she must sing it again." "No, no—she wishes to go—'tis not usual: she will sing it for you, I dare say, this evening, if you ask her." "Well—most charming gal!—Lovely!" "Have patience, my dear Titmouse," said Gammon, in a low whisper, "in a few months' time you'll soon be thrown into much higher life than this—among *really* beautiful, and rich, and accomplished women"—[and, *thought* Gammon, you'll resemble a monkey that has found his way into a rich tulip-bed!] "Fancy Miss Tag-rag standing beside her," whispered Titmouse, scornfully. "Ha, ha?" gently laughed Gammon—"both of them, in their way, are very worthy persons; but"—Here the ladies withdrew. 'Twas no part of Gammon's plans that Titmouse should become the son-in-law of either Quirk or Tag-rag. Mr. Gammon had formed already vastly different plans for him!

As soon as Quirk had taken the head of the table, and the gentlemen drawn together, the bottles were pushed round very briskly, accompanied by no less than three different sorts of snuff-boxes, all belonging to Mr. Quirk—all of

them presents from clients. One was a huge affair of Botany Bay wood, with a very flaming inscription on the inside of the lid; from which it appeared that its amiable donors, who were trying the effect of a change of climate on their moral health at the expense of a grateful country, owed their valuable lives to the professional skill and exertions of "Caleb Quirk, Esq." In short, the other two were trophies of a similar description, of which their possessor was very justly not a little proud; and as he saw Titmouse admiring them, it occurred to him as very possible that, within a few months' time, he should be in possession of a magnificent *gold* snuff-box, in acknowledgment of the services he should have rendered to his distinguished guest and client. Titmouse was in the highest possible spirits. This, his first glimpse into high life, equalled all his expectations. Round and round went the bottles—crack went joke after joke. Slang sung song upon song, of, however, so very coarse and broad a character as infinitely disgusted Gammon, and apparently shocked the alderman;—though I greatly distrust that old sinner's sincerity in the matter. Then Ghastly's performances commenced. Poor fellow! he exerted himself to the utmost to earn the good dinner he had just devoured: but when he was in the very middle of one of his most impassionate scenes—undoubtedly *fearing a passion to rags*,"—Mr. Quirk interrupted, impatiently—"Come, come, Ghastly, we've had enough of that sort—it don't suit at all!—Lord bless us!—don't *roar* so, man!" Poor Ghastly instantly resumed his seat, with a chagrined and melancholy air. "Give us something funny," snuffled the alderman. "Let's have the chorus of 'Pigs and Ducks,'" said Quirk; "you do that *remarkable* well. I could fancy the animals were running, and squealing, and quacking all about the room." The actor did as he was desired, commencing with a sigh, and was much applauded. At length Gammon happened to get into a discussion with Mr. Bluster upon some point connected with the Habeas Corpus Act, in which our friend Gammon, who never got heated in discussion, and was very accurate in whatever he knew, had glaringly the best of it. His calm, smiling self-possession almost drove poor Bluster frantic. The less he knew, of course the louder he talked, the more vehement and positive he became; at length offering a *bet* that he was right; at which Gammon bowed, smiled, and closed the discussion. While engaged in it, he had of course been unable to keep his eye upon Titmouse, who drunk, consequently, like a little fish, never letting the bottle pass him. Every one about him filled his glass every time—why should not he?

Hug sat next to Viper; feared him, and avoided discussion with him; for, though they agreed in their politics, which were of the loosest and lowest radical description, they had a personal antipathy each to the other. In spite of their wishes, they at length got entangled in a very virulent controversy, and said so many insulting things to each other, that the rest of the company, who had for some time been amusing, got at length—not disgusted—but alarmed, for the possible results. Mr. Quirk, therefore, interfered.

"Bravo! bravo! bravo!" he exclaimed, as Viper concluded a most envenomed passage, "that will do, Viper—whip it into the next *Flash*—'twill be a capital leader! It will produce a sensation! And in the meantime, gentlemen, let me request you to fill your glasses—bumpers—for I have a toast to propose, in which you'll all feel interested when you hear who's the subject of it. It is a gentleman who is likely soon to be elevated to a station which Nature has formed him—hem! hem!—to adorn——"

"Mr. Quirk's proposing your health, Titmouse!" whispered Gammon to his companion, who, having been very restless for some time, had at length become quite silent—his head resting on his hand, his elbow on the table, his eyes languidly half open, and his face exceedingly pale. Gammon saw that he was in truth in a very ticklish

"I—wish—you'd—let me—go out—I'm devilish ill," said Titmouse, faintly. Gammon made a signal to Quirk, who instantly ceased his speech; and, coming down to Titmouse, he and Gammon hastily led him out of the room, and into the nearest bedchamber, where he began to be very ill, and so continued for several hours. Old Quirk, who was a long-headed man, was delighted by this occurrence; for he saw that if he insisted on Titmouse's being put to bed, and passing the night—and perhaps the next day—at Alibi House, it would enable Miss Quirk to bring her attractions to bear upon him effectively, by exhibiting those delicate and endearing attentions which are so soothing, and indeed necessary, to an invalid. Titmouse continued severely indisposed during the whole of the night; and, early in the morning, it was thought advisable to send for a medical man, who pronounced Titmouse to be in danger of a bilious fever, and to require rest, and care, and medical attendance for some days to come. This was rather "too much of a good thing" for old Quirk, but there was no remedy. Foreseeing that Titmouse would be thrown constantly, for some little time to come, into Miss Quirk's company, her prudent parent enjoined upon Mrs. Alias, his sister, the necessity of impressing on his daughter's mind the great uncertainty that, after all, existed as to Titmouse's prospects; and the consequent necessity there was for her to regulate her conduct with a view to either failure or success—to keep her affections, as it were, in abeyance. But the fact was, that Miss Quirk had so often heard the subject of Titmouse's brilliant expectations talked of by her father, and knew so well his habitual prudence and caution, that she looked upon Titmouse's speedy possession of ten thousand a-year as a matter almost of certainty. She was a girl of some natural shrewdness, but of an early inclination to maudlin sentimentality. Had she been blessed with the vigilant and affectionate care of a mother as she grew up (her mother having died when Miss Quirk was but a child), and been thrown among a different set of people from those who constantly visited at Alibi House—and of whom a very *favourable* specimen has been laid before the reader—Miss Quirk might really have become a very sensible and agreeable girl. As it was, her manners had contracted a certain coarseness, which at length overspread her whole character; and the selfish and mercenary motives by which she could not fail to perceive all her father's conduct regulated, infected herself. She resolved, therefore, to be governed by the considerations so urgently pressed upon her by both her father and her aunt.

It was several days before Titmouse was allowed, by his medical man, to quit his bed-room; and it is impossible for any woman not to be touched by the sight of a sudden change effected in a man by severe indisposition and suffering—even be that man so poor a creature as Titmouse. He was very pale, and considerably reduced by the severe nature of his complaint, and of the powerful medicines which had been administered to him. When he made his first appearance before Miss Quirk, one afternoon, with somewhat feeble gait, and a languid air that mitigated, if it did not obliterate, the foolish and conceited expression of his features, she really regarded him with considerable interest; and, though she might hardly have owned it even to herself, his expected good fortune invested him with a kind of subdued radiance. *Ten thousand a-year!*—Miss Quirk's heart fluttered! By the time that he was well enough to take his departure, she had, at his request, read over to him nearly half of that truly interesting work—the "Newgate Calendar." She had sung to him, and played to him, whatever he asked her; and, in short, she felt that if she could but be certain that he would gain his great lawsuit, and step into ten thousand a-year, she could *love* him. She insisted, on the day of his quitting Alibi House, that he should write in her album; and he very readily complied. It was nearly ten minutes before he could get a pen to suit

him. At length he succeeded, and left the following interesting memento of himself, in the very centre of a fresh page:—

“Tittlebat Titmouse Is My name,
England Is My Nation,
London Is My dwelling-Place,
And Christ Is My Salvation.

“TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE,
“halibi lodge.”

Miss Quirk turned pale with astonishment and vexation on seeing this elegant and interesting addition to her album. Titmouse, on the contrary, looked at it with no little pride; for having had a capital pen, and his heart being in his task, he had produced what he conceived to be a very superior specimen of penmanship; in fact, the signature was by far the best he had ever written. When he had gone, Miss Quirk was twenty times on the point of tearing out the leaf which had been so dismally disfigured; but on her father coming home in the evening, he laughed heartily; “and as to tearing it out,” said he, “let us first see which way the verdict is.”

Titmouse became, after this, a pretty frequent visitor at Alibi House; growing more and more attached to Miss Quirk, who, however, conducted herself towards him with much judgment. His inscription on her album had done a vast deal towards cooling down the ardour with which she had been disposed to regard even the future owner of ten thousand a-year. Poor Snap seemed to have lost all chance, being treated with greater coldness by Miss Quirk on every succeeding visit to Alibi House. At this he was sorely discomfited; for she would have whatever money her father might die possessed of, besides a commanding interest in the partnership business. ’Twas a difficult thing for him to preserve his temper in his close intimacy with Titmouse, who had so grievously interfered with his prospects.

The indisposition I have been mentioning prevented Titmouse from paying his promised visit to Satin Lodge. On returning to his lodgings, from Alibi House, he found that Tag-rag had either called or sent every day to inquire after him with the most affectionate anxiety; and one or two notes lying on his table apprised him of the lively distress which the ladies of Satin Lodge were enduring on his account, and implored him to lose not a moment in communicating the state of his health, and personally assuring them of his safety. Though the image of Miss Quirk was continually before his eyes, Titmouse, nevertheless, had cunning enough not to drop the slightest hint to the Tag-rags of the true state of his feelings. Whenever any inquiry, with ill-disguised anxiety, was made by Mrs. Tag-rag concerning Alibi House and its inmates, Titmouse would, to be sure, mention Miss Quirk, but in such a careless and slighting way as gave great consolation and encouragement to Tag-rag, his wife, and daughter. When at Mr. Quirk’s, he spoke somewhat unreservedly of the amiable inmates of Satin Lodge. These two mansions were almost the only private residences visited by Titmouse, who spent his time much in the way which I have already described. How he got through his days I can hardly tell. At his lodgings he got up very late, and went to bed very late. He never read anything excepting occasionally a song-book lent him by Snap, or a novel, or some such book as “Boxiana,” from the circulating library. Dawdling over his dress and his breakfast, then whistling and humming, took up so much of every day as he passed at his lodgings. The rest was spent in idling about the town, looking in at shop windows, and now and then going to some petty exhibition. When evening came, he was generally joined by Snap, when they would spend the night together in the manner I have already described. As often as he dared, he called at Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap’s office at

Saffron Hill, and worried them not a little by inquiries concerning the state of his affairs, and the cause of the delay in commencing proceedings. As for Huckaback, by the way, Titmouse cut him entirely; saying that he was a devilish low fellow, and it was no use knowing him. He made many desperate efforts, both personally and by letter, to renew his acquaintance with Titmouse, but in vain. I may as well mention, by the way, that as soon as Snap got scent of the little money transaction between his friend and Huckaback, he called upon the latter, and tendering him twelve shillings, demanded up the document which he had extorted from Titmouse. Huckaback held out obstinately for some time; but Snap was too much for him, and talked in such a formidable strain about an indictment for a conspiracy (!) and fraud, that Huckaback at length consented, on receiving twelve shillings, to deliver up the document to Snap, on condition of Snap's destroying it on the spot. This was done, and so ended all intercourse—at least on this side of the grave—between Titmouse and Huckaback.

The sum allowed by Messrs. Quirk and Gammon to Titmouse, was amply sufficient to have kept him in comfort; but it never would have enabled him to lead the kind of life which I have described; and he would certainly have got very awkwardly involved had it not been for the kindness of Snap in advancing him, from time to time, such sums as his exigencies required. In fact, matters went on as quietly and smoothly as possible for several months—till about the middle of November, when an event occurred that seemed to threaten the total demolition of all his hopes and expectations.

He had not seen or heard from Messrs. Quirk or Gammon for nearly a fortnight; Snap he had not seen for nearly a week. At length he ventured to make his appearance at Saffron Hill, and was received with a startling coldness—a stern abruptness of manner, that frightened him out of his wits. All the three partners were alike—as for Snap, the contrast between his present and former manner was perfectly shocking; he seemed quite another person. The fact was, that the full statement of Titmouse's claims had been laid before Mr. Subtle, the leading counsel retained in his behalf, for his opinion, before actually commencing proceedings; and the partners were indeed thunderstruck on receiving that opinion: for Mr. Subtle pointed out a radical deficiency of proof in a matter which, as soon as their attention was thus pointedly called to it, Messrs. Quirk and Gammon were amazed at their having overlooked, and still more at its having escaped the notice of Mr. Tresayle, Mr. Mortmain, and Mr. Frankpledge. Mr. Quirk hurried with the opinion to the first two gentlemen; and after a long interview with each, they owned their fears that Mr. Subtle was right, and that the defect seemed incurable; but they showed their agitated clients, that *they* had been guilty of neither oversight nor ignorance, inasmuch as the matter in question was one of *evidence* only—one which a *nisi prius* lawyer, with a full detail of “proofs” before him, could hardly fail to light upon—but which, it would be found, had been assumed and taken for granted in the cases laid before conveyancers. They promised to turn it over in their minds, and to let Messrs. Quirk and Gammon know if anything occurred to vary their impression. Mr. Tresayle and Mr. Mortmain, however, preserved an ominous silence. As for Frankpledge, he had a knack, somehow or another, of always coming to the conclusion wished and hoped for by his clients; and wrote a very long opinion, to show that there was nothing in the objection. Neither Mr. Quirk nor Mr. Gammon could understand the process by which Mr. Frankpledge arrived at such a result; but, in despair, they laid his opinion before Mr. Subtle, in the shape of a second case for his opinion. It was, in a few days' time, returned to them, with only a line or two—thus:—

“With every respect for the gentleman who wrote this opinion, I cannot

perceive what it has to do with the question. I see no reason whatever to depart from the view I have already taken of this case.—J. S.”

Here was something like a dead lock, indeed!

“We’re done, Gammon!” said Quirk with a dismayed air. Gammon seemed lost, and made no answer. “Does anything—eh? Anything occur to you? Gammon, I *will* say this for you—you’re a long-headed fellow!” Still Gammon spoke not. “Gammon! Gammon! I really believe—you begin to see something.” “*It’s to be done*, Mr. Quirk!” said Gammon at length, with a grave and apprehensive look, and a cheek paler than before. “Eh? how? Oh, I see!—Know what you mean, Gammon,” replied Quirk with a hurried whisper, glancing at both doors to see that they were safe. “We must resume our intercourse with Titmouse, and let matters go on as before,” said Gammon with a very anxious, but, at the same time, a determined air. “I—I wonder if what has occurred to *you* is what has occurred to me?” inquired Quirk in an eager whisper. “Pooh! pooh! Mr. Quirk.” “Gammon, dear Gammon, no mystery! You know I have a deep stake in this matter!” “So have I, Mr. Quirk,” replied Gammon with a sigh. “However”—Here the partners put their heads close together, and whispered to each other in a low, earnest tone, for some minutes. Quirk rose from his seat, and took two or three turns about the room in silence, Gammon watching him calmly.

To his inexpressible relief and joy, within a few hours of the happening of the above colloquy, Titmouse found himself placed on precisely his former footing with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap.

In order to bring on the cause for trial at the next spring assizes, it was necessary that the declaration in ejectment should be served on the tenant in possession before Hilary term; and, in a matter of such magnitude, it was deemed expedient for Snap to go down and personally effect the service in question. In consequence, also, of some very important suggestions as to the evidence, given by the junior in the cause, it was arranged that Snap should go down about a week before the time fixed upon for effecting the service, and make minute inquiries as to one or two facts which it was understood could be established in evidence. As soon as Titmouse heard of this movement, that Snap was going direct to Yatton, the scene of his (Titmouse’s) future greatness, he made the most pertinacious and vehement entreaties to Messrs. Quirk and Gammon to be allowed to accompany him, even going down on his knees. There was no resisting this; but they exacted a solemn pledge from him that he would place himself entirely at the disposal of Snap; go under some feigned name, and, in short, neither say nor do anything tending to disclose their real character or errand.

Snap and Titmouse established themselves at the Hare and Hounds Inn at Grilston; and the former immediately began, cautiously and quietly, to collect such evidence as he could discover. One of the first persons to whom he went was old blind Bess. His many pressing questions at length stirred up in the old woman’s mind recollections of long-forgotten names, persons, places, scenes, and associations, thereby producing an agitation not easily to be got rid of, and which had by no means subsided when Dr. Tatham and Mr. Aubrey paid her the Christmas Day visit, which has been already described.

CHAPTER XI.

THE reader has had already pretty distinct indications of the manner in which Titmouse and Snap conducted themselves during their stay in Yorkshire, and which, I fear, have not tended to raise either of these gentlemen in the reader's estimation. Titmouse manifested a very natural anxiety to see the present occupants of Yatton: and it was with infinite difficulty that Snap could prevent him from sneaking about in the immediate neighbourhood of the Hall, with the hope of seeing them. His first encounter with Mr. and Miss Aubrey was entirely accidental, as the reader may remember; and when he found that the lady on horseback near Yatton, and the lady whom he had striven to attract the notice of in Hyde Park, were one and the same beautiful woman, and that that beautiful woman was neither more nor less than the sister of the present owner of Yatton—the marvellous discovery created a mighty pothor in his little feelings. The blaze of Kate Aubrey's beauty, in an instant consumed the images both of Tabitha Tag-rag and Dora Quirk. It even for a while outshone the splendours of ten thousand a-year: such is the inexpressible and incalculable power of woman's beauty over everything in the shape of man—over even so despicable a sample of him as Tittlebat Titmouse.

While putting in practice some of those abominable tricks to which, under Snap's tutelage Titmouse had become accustomed in walking the streets of London, and from which even the rough handling they had got from farmer Hazel could not turn him, Titmouse at length, as has been seen, most unwittingly fell foul of that fair creature, Catharine Aubrey herself; who seemed truly like an angelic messenger, returning from her errand of sympathy and mercy, and suddenly beset by a little imp of darkness. When Titmouse discovered who was the object of his audacious and revolting advances, his soul was petrified within him; and it was fortunate that the shriek of Miss Aubrey's attendant at length startled him into a recollection of a pair of heels, to which he was that evening indebted for an escape from a most murderous cudgeling, which might have been attended with one effect not contemplated by him who inflicted it; viz., the retention of the Aubreys in the possession of Yatton! Titmouse ran for nearly half-a-mile on the high-road towards Grilston, without stopping. He dared not venture back to Yatton, with the sound of the lusty farmer's voice in his ears, to get back from the Aubrey Arms the horse which had brought him that afternoon from Grilston, to which place he walked on, through the snow and darkness; reaching his inn in a perfect panic, from which, at length, a tumbler of stiff brandy and water, with two or three cigars, somewhat relieved him. Forgetful of the solemn pledge which he had given, to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, not to disclose his name or errand; and it never once occurring to him that, if he would but keep his own counsel, Miss Aubrey could never identify *him* with the ruffian who had assailed her, he spent the interval between eight and twelve o'clock, at which latter hour the coach by which he had resolved to return to London would pass through Grilston, in indicting the following letter to Miss Aubrey:—

"Grilston, January 6th, 18—."

"HONOURED MISS,

"Hoping No Offence Will Be Taken where None is meant, (*which am Sure of*) This I send To say Who I am which, Is the Right And True Owner of Yatton which You Enjoy Amongst You All At This present (Till The Law Give it to Me) Which It quickly Will And which It Ought to Have done When I were First born And Before Yr. Respect. Family ever Came into it And All

which Yr. hond. Brother Have so unlawfully Got Possession Of must Come Back to Them Whose Due It is wh. Is myself as will be Sone provid. And wh. am most truly Sorry Of *on your own Acct.* (Meaning (hond. Miss,) you Alone) as Sure as Yatton is Intirely Mine So My Heart is *yours* and No Longer my Own Ever since I Saw You first as Can Easily prove but wh. doubtless You Have forgot Seeing You Never New, seeing (as Mr. Gammon, My Soliciter And a Very Great Lawyer, say) *Cases Alter Circumstances*, what Can I say More Than that I Love you *Most Amazing* Such As Never Thought Myself Capable of Doing Before and wh. cannot help Ever Since I First saw Yor most *Lovely* and *Divine* and *striking* Face wh. have Stuck In my Mind Ever Since Day and Night Sleeping and Waking I will Take my Oath Never Of Having Lov'd Any one Else, Though (must Say) have Had a Wonderful Many *Offers* From Females of *The Highest Rank* Since my Truly Wonderful Good fortune got Talked About every Where but have *Refused Them All for yr. sake*, And Would All the World But you. When I Saw You on Horseback It was All my Sudden confusion In Seeing you (The Other Gent. was One of my Resp^c Solicitors) w^h Threw Me off in that Ridiculous Way w^h was a Great Mortification And made My brute Of A horse *go on so* For I Remembered You and was Wonderful struck *with Your Improv'd Appearance* (As that Same Gent. can Testify) And you was (Hon^d. Miss) Quite Wrong *To Night* when You Spoke so Uncommon Angry To Me, seeing If I Had Only known What Female It Was (meaning *yourself which I respect So*) out so Late Alone I should Have spoke quite Different So hope You Will Think Nothing More Of that Truly *Unpleasant Erent* Now (Hon^d. Madam) What I Have To say Is if You will Please To Condescend To Yield To My Desire We Can Live Most uncommon Comfortable at Yatton Together w^h Place shall Have Great Pleasure in *Marrying You From* and I may (*perhaps*) Do Something Handsome for y^r respectable Brother And Family, w^h can Often Come to see us And Live in the Neighbourhood, if You Refus me, Will not say What shall Happen to *Those* which (am Told) *One me a Precious Long Figure* w^h May (*perhaps*) Make a Handsome Abatement in, if You And I *lit it*. Hoping You Will Forget what Have So Much Griev^d. me, And Write p^r return of Post. Am, hond. Miss, Yr most Loving & Devoted Servant (Till Death),

"TITTLBAT TITMOUSE.

("Private.")

This equally characteristic and disgusting production, its accomplished writer sealed twice, and then left, together with sixpence, in the hands of the laud-lady of the Hare and Hounds, to be delivered at Yatton Hall the first thing in the morning. The good woman, however, having no particular wish to oblige such a strange puppy, whom she was only too glad to get rid of, and having a good deal to attend to, laid the letter aside on the chimney-piece, and entirely lost sight of it for nearly a fortnight. Shortly after the lamentable tidings concerning the impending misfortunes of the Aubrey family had been communicated to the inhabitants of Grilston, she forwarded the letter (little dreaming of the character in which its writer was likely, ere long, to appear at Grilston), together with one or two others, a day or two after Miss Aubrey had had the interview with her brother which I have described to the reader; but it lay unnoticed by any one—above all, by the sweet sufferer whose name was indicated on it—among a great number of miscellaneous letters and papers which had been suffered to accumulate on the library table.

Mr. Aubrey entered the library one morning alone, for the purpose of attending to many matters which had been long neglected. He was evidently thinner: his face was pale, and his manner dejected: still there was about him an air of calmness and resolution. Through the richly-pictured old

stained-glass window, the mottled sunbeams were streaming in a kind of tender radiance upon the dear old familiar objects around him. All was silent. Having drawn his chair to the table, on which were lying a confused heap of letters and papers, he felt a momentary repugnance to enter upon the task which he had assigned to himself, of opening and attending to them, and walked slowly for some time up and down the room, with folded arms, uttering occasionally profound sighs. At length he sat down, and commenced the disheartening task of opening the many letters before him. One of the first he opened was from Peter Johnson—the old tenant to whom he had lent the sum of two hundred pounds; and it was full of expressions of gratitude and respect. Then came a letter, a fortnight old, bearing the frank of Lord —, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. He opened it and read:—

“Whitehall, 16th January, 18—.

“MY DEAR AUBREY,

“You will remember that Lord —’s motion stands for the 28th. We all venture to calculate upon receiving your powerful support in the debate. We expect to be much pressed with the Duke of —’s affairs, which you handled shortly before the recess with such signal ability and success. When you return to town, you must expect a renewal of certain offers, which I most sincerely trust, for the benefit of the public service, will not be *again* declined. Ever yours faithfully,

“C—.

“ (Private and confidential.)

“CHARLES AUBREY, ESQ., M.P.”

Mr. Aubrey laid down the letter calmly, as soon as he had read it; and leaning back in his chair, seemed lost in thought for several minutes. Presently he re-applied himself to his task, and opened and glanced over a great many letters. Many letters were on private, and still more on county business; and with one of them he was engaged, when a servant entered with one of that morning’s county papers. Tired with his task, Mr. Aubrey rose from his chair as the servant gave him the paper; and, standing before the fire, unfolded the *Yorkshire Stingo*, and glanced listlessly over its miscellaneous contents. At length his eye lit upon the following paragraph:—

“The rumours so deeply affecting a member for a certain borough in this county, and to which we alluded in our last paper but one, turn out to be well-founded. A claimant has started up to the very large estates at present held by the gentleman in question; and we are very much misinformed if the ensuing spring assizes will not effect a considerable change in the representation of the borough alluded to, by relieving it from the Tory thralldom under which it has been so long oppressed. We have no wish to bear hard upon a falling man; and, therefore, shall make no comment upon the state of mind in which that person may be presumed to be, who must be conscious of having been so long enjoying the just rights of others. Some extraordinary disclosures may be looked for when the trial comes on. We have heard from a quarter on which we are disposed to place reliance, that the claimant is a gentleman of decided Whig principles, and who will prove a valuable accession to the Liberal cause.”

Mr. Aubrey was certainly somewhat shocked by brutality such as this; but, on Miss Aubrey’s entering the room, he quietly folded up the paper and laid it aside, fearful lest his sister’s feelings should be pierced by so coarse and cruel a paragraph, which, in fact, had been concocted in London in the office of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, who were, as before stated, interested in the *Sunday Flash*, which was in some sort connected, through the relationship of

the editors, with the *Yorkshire Stingo*. The idea had been suggested by Gammon, of attempting to enlist the *political* feeling of a portion of the county in favour of their client.

"Here are letters for *you*, Kate," said her brother, picking several of them out. The very first she took up, it having attracted her attention by the double seal, and the vulgar style of the handwriting, was that from Titmouse, which has just been laid before the reader. With much surprise she opened the letter, her brother being similarly engaged with his own; and her face getting gradually paler and paler as she went on, at length she flung it on the floor, with a passionate air, and burst into tears. Her brother, with astonishment, exclaimed,—"Dear Kate, what is it?" and he rose and stooped to pick up the letter.

"Don't—don't, Charles!" she cried, putting her foot upon it, and flinging her arms round his neck. "It is an audacious letter—a vulgar, a cruel letter, dear Charles!" Her emotion increased as her thoughts recurred to the heartless paragraph concerning her brother, with which the letter concluded. "I could have overlooked everything but *that*," said she, unwittingly. With gentle force he succeeded in getting hold of the painfully ridiculous and contemptible effusion. He attempted faintly to smile several times as he went on.

"Don't—don't, dearest Charles! I can't bear it. Don't smile—It's very far from your heart; you do it only to assure *me*."

Here Mr. Aubrey read the paragraph concerning himself. His face turned a little paler than before, and his lips quivered with suppressed emotion. "He is evidently a *very* foolish fellow!" he exclaimed, walking towards the window, with his back to his sister, whom he did not wish to see how much he was affected by so petty an incident.

"What does he allude to, Kate, when he talks of your having spoken angrily to him, and that he did not know you?" he inquired, after a few moments' pause, returning to her.

"Oh dear!—I am so *grieved* that you should have noticed it—but since you ask me"—and she told him the occurrence alluded to in the letter. Mr. Aubrey drew himself up unconsciously as Kate went on, and she perceived him becoming still paler than before, and *felt* the kindling anger of his eye.

"Forget it—forget it, dearest Charles!—So despicable a being is really not worth a thought," said Kate, with increasing anxiety; for she had never in her life before witnessed her brother the subject of such powerful emotions as then made rigid his slender frame. At length, drawing a long breath—

"It is fortunate, Kate," said he, calmly, "that *he* is not a gentleman, and that I *endeavour* to be—a Christian." She flung her arms round him, exclaiming, "There spoke my own noble brother!"

"I shall preserve this letter as a curiosity, Kate," said he presently; and with a pointed significance of manner, that arrested his sister's attention, he added,—"*It is rather singular, but some time before you came in, I opened a letter in which your name is mentioned—I cannot say in a similar manner, and yet, in short, it is from Lord De la Zouch, enclosing one—*" Miss Aubrey suddenly blushed scarlet, and trembled violently. "Don't be agitated, my dear Kate, the enclosure is from Lady De la Zouch; and if it be in the same strain of kindness that pervades Lord De la Zouch's letter to *me*—" "I would rather that *you* opened and read it, Charles"—she faltered, sinking into a chair. "Come, come, dear Kate—play the woman!" said her brother, with an affectionate air,—"*To say that there is nothing in these letters that I believe will interest you—very deeply gratify and interest your feelings—would be—*"

"I know—I—I—suspect—I"—faltered Miss Aubrey with much agitation—"I shall return."

"Then you shall take these letters with you, and read, or not read them, as

you like, said her brother, putting the letters into her hand with a fond and sorrowful smile, that soon, however, flitted away—and, leading her to the door, he was once more alone; and, after a brief interval of reverie, he wrote answers to such of the many letters before him as he considered earliest to require them.

Notwithstanding the judgment and tenderness with which Dr. Tatham discharged the very serious duty which, at the entreaty of his afflicted friends, he had undertaken, of breaking to Mrs. Aubrey the calamity with which she and her family were menaced, the effects of the disclosure had been most disastrous. They had paralysed her; and Mr. Aubrey, who had long been awaiting the issue, in sickening suspense, in an adjoining room, was hastily summoned in to behold a mournful and heartrending spectacle. His venerable mother—she who had given him life at the mortal peril of her own; she whom he cherished with unutterable tenderness and reverence; she who had doated upon him as upon the light of her eyes; from whose dear lips he had never heard a word of unkindness or severity; whose heart had never known an impulse but of gentle, noble, unbounded generosity towards all around her—this idolized being now lay suddenly prostrated and blighted before him——

Poor Aubrey yielded to his long and violent agony, in the presence of her who could apparently no longer hear, or see, or be sensible of what was passing in the chamber.

“My son,” said Dr. Tatham, after the first burst of his friend’s grief was over, and he knelt down beside his mother with her hand grasped in his, “despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of His correction: ‘For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. The Lord will not cast off for ever; but though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion, according to the multitude of His mercies; for He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.’”

It was with great difficulty that Dr. Tatham could render himself audible while murmuring these soothing and solemn passages of Scripture in the ear of his distracted friend, beside whom he knelt.

Mrs. Aubrey had suffered a paralytic seizure, and lay motionless and insensible; her features slightly disfigured, but partially concealed beneath her long silvery grey hair, which had, in the suddenness of the fit, strayed from beneath her cap.

“But what am I about?” at length exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, with a languid and alarmed air—“has medical assistance——”

“Dr. Goddard and Mr. Whateley are both sent for by several servants, and will doubtless be very quickly here,” replied Dr. Tatham; and while he yet spoke, Mr. Whateley—who, when hastened on by the servant who had been sent for him, was entering the park on a visit to young Mrs. Aubrey, who was also seriously ill and in peculiarly critical circumstances—entered the room, and immediately resorted to the necessary measures. Soon afterwards, also, Dr. Goddard arrived; but, alas, how little could they do for the venerable sufferer?

During the next, and for many ensuing days, the lodge was assailed by very many anxious and sympathizing inquirers, who were answered by Waters, whom Mr. Aubrey—oppressed by the number of friends who hurried up to the Hall, and insisted upon seeing him to ascertain the extent to which the dreadful rumours were correct—had stationed there during the day to afford the requisite information. The Hall was pervaded by a gloom that could be felt. Every servant had a woe-begone look, and moved about as if a funeral were stirring. Little Charles and Agnes, almost imprisoned in their nursery, seemed quite puzzled and confused at the strange unusual seriousness, and quietness, and melancholy faces everywhere about them. Kate romped not with them

as had been her wont; but would constantly burst into tears as she held them on her knee or in her arms, trying to evade the continual questioning of Charles. "I think it will be time for *me* to cry too by-and-by?" said he to her one day, with an air half in jest and half in earnest, that made poor Kate's tears flow afresh. Sleepless nights and days of sorrow soon told upon her appearance. Her glorious buoyancy of spirits, that ere-while, as it were, had filled the whole Hall with gladness—where were they now? Ah, me! the rich bloom had disappeared from her beautiful cheek; but her high spirit, though oppressed, was not broken, and she stood firmly and calmly amid the scowling skies and lowering tempests. You fancied you saw her auburn tresses stirred upon her pale but calm brow by the breath of the approaching storm; and that she also felt it, but trembled not, gazing on it with a bright and steadfast eye. Her *heart* might be, indeed, bruised and shaken; but her *spirit* was, ay, unconquerable. My glorious Kate, how my heart goes forth towards you!

And thou, her brother, who art of kindred spirit; who art supported by philosophy, and exalted by religion, so that thy constancy cannot be shaken or overthrown by the black and ominous swell of trouble which is increasing and closing around thee, I know that thou wilt outlive the storm—and yet it rocks thee!

'Twas Sabbath evening, some five weeks or so after the happening of the mournful events above commemorated, and Kate, having spent, as usual, several hours keeping watch beside the silent and motionless figure of her mother, had quitted the chamber for a brief interval, thinking to relieve her oppressed spirits by walking, for a little while, up and down the long gallery. Having slowly paced backwards and forwards once or twice, she rested against the little oriel window at the furthest extremity of the gallery, and gazed, with saddened eye upon the setting sun, till at length, in calm grandeur, it disappeared beneath the horizon. "I will go," said she to herself, as she walked slowly along, "and try to play the evening hymn—I may not have *many* more opportunities!" With this view, she gently opened the drawing-room door, and, glancing around, found that she should be alone. The fire gave the only light. She opened the organ with a sigh, and then sat down before it for some minutes without touching the keys. At length in a low and rather tremulous voice, she begun—

"Soon will the evening star, with silver ray,
Shed its mild radiance o'er the sacred day;
Resume we, then, ere night and silence reign,
The rites which holiness and heaven ordain——"

She sang the last line somewhat indistinctly; and, overcome by a flood of tender recollections, ceased playing; then, leaning her head upon her hand, she shed tears. At length she resumed—

"Here humbly let us hope our Maker's smile
Will crown with sweet success our earthly toil—
And here, on each returning Sabbath, join ——"

Here poor Kate's voice quivered—and, after one or two ineffectual attempts to sing the next line, she sobbed, and ceased playing. She remained for several minutes, her face buried in her handkerchief, shedding tears. At length, "I'll play the last verse," thought she, "and then sit down before the fire, and read over the evening service (feeling for her little prayer-book), before I return to poor mamma!" With a firmer hand and voice she proceeded—

"Father of Heaven! in whom our hopes confide,
Whose power defends us, and whose precepts guide—
In life our guardian, and in death our friend,
Glory supreme be Thine, till time shall end!"

She played and sang these lines with a kind of solemn energy; and she felt as if a ray of heavenly light had trembled for a moment upon her upturned eye. She had not been, as she had supposed, alone; in the furthest corner of the room had been all the while sitting her brother—too exquisitely touched by the simplicity and goodness of his sweet sister, to apprise her of his presence. Several times his feelings had nearly overpowered him; and as she concluded, he arose from his chair, and approaching her, after her first surprise was over,—“Heaven bless you, dear Kate!” said he, taking her hands in his own. Neither of them spoke for a few moments. “I could not have sung a line, or played, if I had known that you were here,” said she. “I thought so, Kate.” “I don’t think I shall ever have heart to play again!”—They were both silent. “Be assured, Kate, that submission to the will of God,” said Mr. Aubrey, as (he with his arm round his sister) they walked slowly to and fro, “is the great lesson to be learned from the troubles of life; and for that purpose they are sent. Let us bear up awhile; the waters will not go over our heads!” “I hope not,” replied his sister, faintly, and in tears. “How did you leave Agnes, Charles?” “She was asleep: she is still very feeble —”

Here the door was suddenly opened, and Miss Aubrey’s maid entered hastily, exclaiming, “Are you here, ma’am?—or sir?” “Here we are,” they replied, hurrying towards her; “what is the matter?” “Oh, madam is *talking*! She began speaking all of a sudden. She did, indeed, sir. She’s talking, and —” continued the girl, almost breathless. “My mother talking!” exclaimed Aubrey, with an amazed air. “Oh yes, sir! she is—she is indeed!”

Miss Aubrey sank into her brother’s arms, overcome for a moment with the sudden and surprising intelligence.

“Rouse yourself, Kate!” he exclaimed with animation; “did I not tell you that Heaven would not forget us? But I must hasten upstairs, to hear the joyful sounds with my own ears—and do you follow as soon as you can.” Leaving her to the care of her maid, he hastened out of the room upstairs, and was soon at the door of his mother’s chamber. He stood for a moment in the doorway, and his straining ears caught the gentle tones of his mother’s voice, speaking in a low but cheerful tone. His knees trembled beneath him with joyful excitement. Fearful of trusting himself in her presence till he had become calmer, he noiselessly sank on the nearest chair, with beating heart and straining ear—ay, every tone of that dear voice thrilled through his heart. But I shall not torture my own or my reader’s heart by dwelling upon the scene that ensued. Alas! the venerable sufferer’s tongue was indeed loosed;—but reason had fled! He listened—he distinguished her words. She supposed that all her children—dead and alive—were romping about her; she spoke of him and his sister as she had spoken to them twenty years ago.

As soon as he had made this sad discovery, overwhelmed with grief he staggered out of the room; and motioning his sister, who was entering, into an adjoining apartment, communicated to her, with great agitation, the woful condition of their mother.

CHAPTER XII.

THE chief corner-stone suddenly found wanting in the glittering fabric of Mr. Titmouse’s fortune, so that to the eyes of its startled architects, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, it seemed momentarily threatening to tumble about their ears, was a certain piece of evidence which, being a matter-of-fact man, I should like to explain to the reader before we get on any further. In order

however, to do this effectually, I must go back to an earlier period in the history than has been yet called to his attention.

How did Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, first come to be acquainted with the precarious tenure by which Mr. Aubrey held the Yatton property? Why, it chanced in this wise.

Mr. Parkinson of Grilston, who has been already introduced to the reader, succeeded to his late father, in one of the most respectable practices, as a country attorney and solicitor in Yorkshire. He was a highly honourable, pains-taking man, and deservedly enjoyed the confidence of his clients. Some twelve years before the period at which this history commences, Mr. Parkinson, who was a very kind-hearted man, had taken into his service an orphan boy of the name of Steggars, at first merely as a sort of errand-boy, and to look after the office. He soon, however, displayed so much sharpness, and acquitted himself so creditably in anything that he happened to be concerned in, a little above the run of his ordinary duties, that in the course of a year or two he became a sort of clerk. Higher and higher did he rise, in process of time, in his master's estimation; and at length became quite a *factotum*—as such, acquainted with the whole course of business that passed through the office. Many interesting matters connected with the circumstances and connections of the neighbouring nobility and gentry were thus constantly brought under his notice, and now and then set him thinking whether the knowledge thus acquired could not, in some way, and at some time or another, be turned to his own advantage; for I am sorry to say that he was utterly unworthy of the confidence of Mr. Parkinson. This worthy made a practice of minuting down anything of interest or importance in the affairs which thus came under his notice—even laboriously copying long documents, when he thought them of importance enough for his purpose, and had the opportunity of doing so without attracting the attention of Mr. Parkinson. He thus silently acquired a mass of information which might have enabled him to occasion great annoyance, and even inflict serious injury; and the precise object he had in view, was either to force himself, hereafter, into partnership with his employer (provided he could get regularly introduced into the profession), or even compel his master's clients to receive him into their confidence, adversely to Mr. Parkinson, making it worth his while to keep the secrets of which he had become possessed. On the occasion of Mr. Aubrey's intended marriage with Miss St. Clair, with a view to the very liberal settlements which he contemplated, a full abstract of his title was laid by Mr. Parkinson before his conveyancer, in order to advise and prepare the necessary instruments. Owing to inquiries suggested by the conveyancer, additional statements were laid before him; and produced an opinion of a somewhat unsatisfactory description, from which I shall lay before the reader the following paragraph:—

“There seems no reason for supposing that any descendant of Stephen Dreddlington is now in existence: still, *as it is by no means physically impossible that such a person may be in esse*, it would unquestionably be most important to the security of Mr. Aubrey's title, to establish clearly the validity of the conveyance by way of mortgage, executed by Harry Dreddlington, and which was afterwards assigned to Geoffrey Dreddlington on his paying off the money borrowed by his deceased uncle: since the descent of Mr. Aubrey from Geoffrey Dreddlington would, in that event clothe him with an indefeasible title at law, by virtue of that deed; and any equitable rights which were originally outstanding would be barred by lapse of time. But the difficulty occurring to my mind on this part of the case is, that unless Harry Dreddlington, who executed that deed of mortgage, survived his father (a point on which I am surprised that I am furnished with no information), the deed itself would have been mere waste parchment, as in reality the conveyance of a person who

never had any interest in the Yatton property—and, of course, neither Geoffrey Dreddlington, nor his descendant, Mr. Aubrey, could derive any right whatever under such an instrument. In that case, such a contingency as I have above hinted at—I mean the existence of any legitimate descendant of Stephen Dreddlington—might have a most serious effect upon the rights of Mr. Aubrey."

Now every line of this opinion, and also even of the Abstract of Title upon which it was written, did this quick-sighted young scoundrel copy out, and deposit, as a great prize, in his desk, among other similar notes and memoranda, little wotting his master the while of what he was doing. Some year or two afterwards the relationship subsisting between Mr. Parkinson and his clerk Steggars was suddenly determined by a somewhat untoward event, viz., by the latter's decamping with the sum of £700 sterling, being the amount of money due on a mortgage which he had been sent to receive from a client of Mr. Parkinson's. Steggars fled for it—but first having bethought himself of the documents to which I have been alluding, and which he carried with him to London. Hot pursuit was made after the unfortunate delinquent, who was taken into custody two or three days after his arrival in town, while he was walking about the streets with the whole sum which he had embezzled, *minus* a few pounds, upon his person, in bank-notes. He quickly found his way into Newgate. His natural sagacity assured him that his case was rather an ugly one; but hope did not desert him.

"Well, my kiddy," said Grasp, the grimvisaged, grey-headed turnkey, as soon as he had ushered Steggars into his snug little quarters; "here you are, you see—isn't you?" "I think I am," replied Steggars with a sigh. "Well—and if you want to have a chance of not going across the water till you're a many years older, you'll get yourself *defended*, and the sooner the better, d'ye see. There's *Quirk*, *Gammon*, and *Snap*—my eyes! how they *do* thin this here place of ours, to be sure! The only thing's to get 'em soon; 'cause, ye see, they're so run after. Shall I send them to you?"

Steggars answered eagerly in the affirmative. In order to account for this spontaneous good-nature on the part of Grasp, I must explain that old Mr. Quirk had for years secured a large criminal practice, by having in his interest most of the officers attached to police-offices and Newgate, to whom he gave, in fact, systematic gratuities, in order to get their recommendations to the persecuted individuals who came into their power. Very shortly after Grasp's messenger had reached Saffron Hill, with the intelligence that "*there was something new in the trap*," old Quirk bustled down to Newgate, and was introduced to Steggars, with whom he was closeted for some time. He took a lively interest in his new companion, whose narrative of his flight and capture he listened to in a very kind and sympathising way, and promised to do for him whatever his little skill and experience *could* do. He hinted, however, that as Mr. Steggars must be aware a *little* ready money would be required, in order to fee counsel—whereat Steggars looked very dismal indeed, and, knowing the state of his exchequer, imagined himself already on ship-board, on his way to Botany Bay. Old Mr. Quirk asked him if he had no friends who would raise a trifle for a "chum in trouble,"—and on answering in the negative, he observed the enthusiasm of the respectable old gentleman visibly and rapidly cooling down.

"But I'll tell you what, sir," said poor Steggars, suddenly, "if I haven't money, I may have *money's worth* at my command;—I've a little box, that's at my lodging, which those that got me knew nothing of—and in which there is a trifle or two about the families and fortunes of some of the first folk in Yatton, that would be precious well worth looking after, to those that know how to follow up such matters."

Old Quirk hereat pricked up his ears, and asked his young friend how he got possessed of such secrets.

"Oh fie! fie!" said he gently, as soon as Steggars had told him the practices of which I have already put the reader in possession.

"Ah—you may say fie! fie! if you like," quoth Steggars earnestly; "but the thing is, not how they were come by, but what can be done with them, now they're got. For example, there's a certain member of parliament in Yorkshire, that, high as he may hold his head, has no more right to the estates that yield him a good ten thousand a-year than I have, but keeps some folk out of their own, that could pay some other folk a round sum to be put in the way of getting their own;" and that was only *one* of the good things he knew of. Here old Quirk rubbed his chin, hemmed, fidgeted about in his seat, took off his glasses, wiped them, replaced them; and presently went through that ceremony again. He then said that he had the honour of being concerned for a great number of gentlemen in Mr. Steggars' "present embarrassed circumstances," but who had always been able to command at least a five-pound note, at starting, to run a heat for liberty.

"Come, come, old gentleman," quoth Steggars earnestly, "I don't want to go over the water before my time, if I can help it, I assure you; and I see you know the value of what I've got! Such a gentleman as you can turn every bit of paper I have in my box into a fifty-pound note." "All this is moonshine, my young friend," said old Quirk in an irresolute tone and manner. "Ah! is it though? To be able to tell the owner of a fat ten thousand a-year, that you can spring a mine under his feet at any moment—eh?—and no one ever know how you came by your knowledge. And if they wouldn't do what was handsome, couldn't you *get the right heir*—and wouldn't *that*—Lord! it would make the fortunes of half-a-dozen of the first houses in the profession!" Old Quirk got a little excited.

"But mind, sir,—you see," said Steggars, "if I get off, I'm not to be cut out of the thing altogether—eh? I shall look to be taken into your employ, and dealt handsomely by——" "Oh Lord!" exclaimed Quirk involuntarily—adding quickly, "Yes, yes! to be sure! only fair; but let us first get you out of your present difficulty, you know!"

Steggars having first exacted from him a written promise to use his utmost exertions on his (Steggars') behalf, and secure him the services of two of the most eminent Old Bailey counsel—viz., Mr. Bluster and Mr. Slang—gave Mr. Quirk the number of the house where his precious box was, and a written order to the landlord to deliver it up to the bearer: after which Mr. Quirk shook him cordially by the hand, and made his way straight to the house in question, and succeeded in obtaining what he asked for. He faithfully performed his agreement with Steggars; for he retained both Bluster and Slang for him, and got up their briefs with care: but, alas! although these eminent men exerted all their great powers, they succeeded not in either bothering the judge, bamboozling the jury, or browbeating the witnesses (the principal one of whom was Mr. Parkinson); Steggars was found guilty, and sentenced to be transported for life. Enraged at this issue, he sent a message the next day to Mr. Quirk requesting a visit from him. When he arrived, Steggars, in a very violent tone, demanded that his papers should be returned to him. 'Twas in vain that Mr. Quirk explained to him again and again his interesting position with reference to his goods, chattels, and effects—*i.e.*, that, as a convicted felon, he had no further concern with them, and might dismiss all anxiety on that score from his mind. Steggars hereat got more furious than before, and intimated plainly the course he should feel it his duty to pursue—that, if the papers in question were not given up to him as he desired, he should at once write off to his late employer, Mr. Parkinson, and acknowledge how much further he

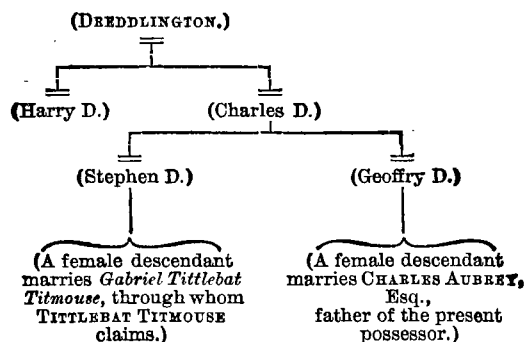
(Steggars) had wronged him and his clients than he supposed of. Old Quirk very feelingly represented to him that he was at liberty to do anything that he thought calculated to relieve his excited feelings: and then Mr. Quirk took a final farewell of his client, wishing him health and happiness.

"I say, Grasp," said he, in a whisper, to that grim functionary, as soon as he had secured poor Steggars in his cell, "that bird is a little ruffled just now—isn't he, think you?" "Lud, sir, the naturalist thing in the world, considering——" "Well, if he should want a letter taken to any one, whatever he may say to the contrary, you'll send it on to Saffron Hill—eh? Understand? He may be injuring himself, you know;" and old Quirk with one hand clasped one huge arm of Grasp in a familiar way, and with the forefinger of the other touched his own chest, and then winked his eye.

"All right!" quoth Grasp, and they parted. Within a very few hours' time, Mr. Quirk received, by the hand of a trusty messenger, from Grasp, a letter written by Steggars to Mr. Parkinson; a long and eloquent letter to the purport and effect which Steggars had intimated. Mr. Quirk read it with much satisfaction, for it disclosed a truly penitent feeling, and a desire to undo as much mischief as the writer had done. He (Mr. Quirk) was not in the least exasperated by certain very plain terms in which his own name was mentioned; but, making all due allowances, quietly put the letter in the fire as soon as he had read it. In due time Mr. Steggars, whose health had suffered from close confinement, caught frequent whiffs of the fresh sea-breeze, having set out, under most favourable auspices, for Botany Bay; to which distant but happy place, he had been thus fortunate in securing, so early, an *appointment for life*.

Such, then, were the miserable means by which Mr. Quirk became acquainted with the exact state of Mr. Aubrey's title: on first becoming apprised of which, Mr. Gammon either felt, or affected, great repugnance to taking any part in the affair. He appeared to suffer himself at length, however, to be over-persuaded by Quirk into acquiescence; and, that point gained—having ends in view of which Mr. Quirk had not the least conception, and which, in fact, had but suddenly occurred to Mr. Gammon himself—worked his materials with a caution, skill, energy, and perseverance, which soon led to important results. Guided by the suggestions of acute and experienced counsel, after much pains and considerable expense, they succeeded in discovering that precious specimen of humanity, Tittlebat Titmouse, who hath already figured so prominently in this history. When they came to set down on paper the result of all their researches and inquiries, in order to submit it in the shape of a case for the opinion of Mr. Mortmain and Mr. Frankpledge, in the manner which has been already described, it looked perfect on paper, as many a faulty pedigree and abstract of title had looked before, and will yet look. It was quite possible for even Mr. Tresayle himself to overlook the defect which had been pointed out by Mr. Subtle. That which is stated to a conveyancer as a *fact*—any particular event, for instance, as of a death, a birth, or a marriage, at a particular time, which the very nature of the case renders highly probable—he may easily assume to be so. But when the same statement comes under the acute and experienced eye of a *nisi prius* lawyer, who knows that he will have to *prove* his case, step by step, the aspect of things is soon changed. The first practitioner at the common law before whom the case came, in its roughest and earliest form, in order that he might "lick it into shape," and "advise generally," preparatory to its "being laid before counsel," was Mr. Traverse, a young pleader, whom Messrs. Quirk and Gammon were disposed to take by the hand. He wrote a very showy, but superficial and delusive opinion; and put the intended *protégé* of his clients, as it were by a kind of hop, step, and jump, into possession of the Yatton estates. Quirk was quite delighted on reading it; but Gammon shook his head with a somewhat sarcastic smile, and said he would at once

prepare a case for the opinion of Mr. Lynx, whom he had pitched upon as a junior counsel in any proceedings which might be instituted in a court of law. Lynx (of whom I shall speak hereafter) was an experienced, hard-headed, vigilant, and accurate lawyer; the very man for such a case, requiring, as it did, most patient and minute examination. I have beside me the original opinion written by Mr. Lynx; and shall treat the reader to a taste of it—giving him sufficient to enable him to appreciate the ticklish position of affairs with Mr. Titmouse. To make it not altogether unintelligible, let us suppose the state of the pedigree to be something like this (as far as concerns our present purpose):—



Now, things standing thus, behold the astute Lynx advising (*inter alia*) in manner following; that is to say:—

"It appears clear that the lessor of the plaintiff (*i.e.*, Tittlebat Titmouse) will be able to prove that Dreddlington (the common ancestor) was seised of the estate at Yatton in the year 1740; that he had two sons, Harry and Charles, the former of whom, after a life of dissipation, appears to have died without issue; and that from the latter (Charles) are descended Stephen, the ancestor of the lessor of the plaintiff, and Geoffry the ancestor of the defendant. Assuming, therefore, that the descent of the lessor of the plaintiff from Stephen, can be made out, as there appears every reason to expect [on this point Lynx had written four brief pages], a clear *primâ facie* case will be established on the part of the lessor of the plaintiff. As, however, it is suspected that Harry D. executed a conveyance in fee of the property, in order to secure the loan contracted by him from Aaron Moses, it will be extremely important to ascertain, and, if possible, procure satisfactory evidence, that his decease occurred before the period at which, by his father's death, that conveyance could have become operative upon the property; since it is obvious that, should he have survived his father, *that instrument, being outstanding*, may form a complete answer to the case of the lessor of the plaintiff. The danger will be obviously increased, should the debt to Aaron Moses prove to have been paid off, as is stated to be rumoured, by Geoffry D., the younger son of Charles D., for, should that turn out to be the case, he would probably have taken a conveyance to himself, or to trustees for his benefit, from Aaron Moses, which being in the power of the defendant, Mr. Aubrey, would enable him to make out a title to the property, paramount to that now attempted to be set up on behalf of Mr. Titmouse. Every possible exertion, therefore, should be made to ascertain the precise period of the death of Harry D. The registries of the various parishes in which the family may

have at any time resided, should be carefully searched; and an examination made in the churches and churchyards, of all tombstones, escutcheons, etc., belonging, or supposed to belong, to the Dreddlington family, and by which any light can be thrown upon this most important point. It appears clear that Dreddlington (the common ancestor) died on the 7th August, 1742; the question, therefore, simply is, *whether the death of his eldest son (Harry) took place prior or subsequent to that period.* It is to be feared that the defendant may be in possession of some better evidence on this point, than is possessed by the lessor of the plaintiff. The natural presumption certainly seems to be, that the son, being the younger and stronger man, was the survivor."

The above-mentioned opinion of Mr. Lynx, together with that of Mr. Subtle, entirely corroborating it (and which was alluded to in a late chapter of this history), and a pedigree, were lying on the table, one day, at the office at Saffron Hill, before the anxious and perplexed parties, Messrs. Quirk and Gammon.

Gammon was looking attentively, and with a very chagrined air, at the pedigree; and Quirk was looking at Gammon.

"Now, Gammon," said the former, "just let me see again where the exact hitch is—eh? You'll think me perhaps infernally stupid, but—curse me if I can see it!" "See it, my dear sir? Here, *here!*" replied Gammon, with sudden impatience, putting his finger two or three times to the words "*Harry D.*" "Lord bless us! Don't be so sharp with one, Gammon! I know as well as you that that's *about* where the crack is; but what is the precise thing we're in want of, eh!" "Proof, my dear sir, of the death of Harry Dreddlington some time—no matter when—previous to the 7th August, 1742; and in default thereof, Mr. Quirk, we are all flat on our backs, and had better never have stirred in the business."

"You know, Gammon, you're better *up* in these matters than I (only because I've not been able to turn my attention to 'em since I first began business), so just tell me, in a word, what good's to be got by showing that fellow to have died in his father's lifetime?"

"You don't show your usual acuteness, Mr. Quirk," replied Gammon, blandly. "It is to make waste paper of that confounded conveyance which he executed, and which Mr. Aubrey has, and with which he may, at a stroke, cut the ground from under our feet."

"The very thought makes one feel quite funny, don't it, Gammon?" quoth Quirk, with a flustered air.

"It may well do so, Mr. Quirk. Now we *are* fairly embarked in a cause where success will be attended with so many splendid results, Mr. Quirk; though I'm sure you'll always bear me out in saying how very unwilling I was to take advantage of the villainy of that miscreant Steg—hem—"

"Gammon, Gammon, you're always harking back to that—I'm tired of hearing on't!" "Well, now we're in it, I don't see why we should allow ourselves to be baffled by trifles. The plain question is, undoubtedly, whether we are to stand still, or go on."

Mr. Quirk gazed at Mr. Gammon with an anxious and puzzled look. "How d'ye make out—in a legal way, you know, Gammon—*when* a man died, I mean, of a *natural* death?" inquired Quirk, who was familiar enough with the means of proving the exact hour of certain *violent* deaths at Debtor's Door.

"Oh! there are various methods of doing so, my dear sir," replied Gammon, carelessly. "Entries in family-bibles and prayer-books, registers, tombstones—ay, by the way, an old tombstone," continued Gammon musingly, "that would settle the business!"

"An old tombstone!" echoed Quirk briskly. "Lord, Gammon, so it would! That is an *idea!*—I call that a decided idea, Gammon. 'Twould be the very

thing!" "The very thing!" repeated Gammon, pointedly. They remained silent for some moments.

"Snap could not have looked about him sharply enough, when he was down at Yatton!" at length observed Quirk, in a low tone, flushing all over as he uttered the last words, and felt Gammon's cold grey eye settled on him like that of a snake.

"He could not, indeed, my dear sir," replied Gammon, while Quirk continued gazing earnestly at him, now and then wriggling about in his chair, rubbing his chin, and drumming with his fingers on the table.—"And now that you've suggested the thing, it's not to be wondered at—you know, it would have been an old tombstone—a sort of fragment from a tombstone, perhaps—so deeply sunk in the ground, probably, as easily to have escaped observation, eh? Does not it strike *you* so, Mr. Quirk?" All this was said by Gammon in a musing manner, and in a very low tone of voice; and he was delighted to find his words sinking into the eager mind of his companion.

"Ah, Gammon!" exclaimed Quirk, with a sound of partly a sigh, and partly a whistle, (the former being the exponent of the *true* state of his feelings, *i.e.*, anxiety—the latter of what he wished to *appear* the state of his feelings, *i.e.*, indifference.) "Yes, Mr. Quirk?" "You're a deep devil, Gammon—I *will* say that for you!" replied Quirk, glancing towards each door, and, as it were, unconsciously drawing his chair a little closer to that of Gammon.

"Nay, my dear sir!" said Gammon, with a deferential and deprecating smile, "you give me credit for an acuteness I feel I do not deserve! If, indeed, I had not had *your* sagacity to rely upon, ever since I have had the honour of being connected with you—ah, Mr. Quirk, you know you lead—I follow—" "Gammon, Gammon! Come—your name's *Oily*—" "In moments like these, Mr. Quirk, I say nothing that I do not feel," interrupted Gammon gravely, putting to his nose the least modicum of snuff which he could take with the tip of his finger out of the huge box of Mr. Quirk, who, just then, was thrusting immense pinches every half minute up his nostrils.

"It will cost a great deal of money to find that same tombstone, Gammon!" said Quirk, in almost a whisper, and paused, looking intently at Gammon.

"I think this is a different kind of snuff from that which you usually take, Mr. Quirk, isn't it?" inquired Gammon, as he inserted the tips of his fingers into the box. "The same—the same," replied Quirk mechanically. "You are a man better equal to serious emergencies than any man I ever came near," said Gammon; "I perceive that you have hit the nail on the head, as indeed you always do." "Tut? Stuff, Gammon; you're every bit as good a hand as I am." Gammon smiled, shook his head, and shrugged his shoulders. "Tis that practical sagacity of yours," said Gammon—"you know it as well as I can tell you—that has raised you to your present professional eminence." He paused, and looked very sincerely at his senior partner. "Well, I must own I think I *do* know a trick or two," quoth Quirk, with a sort of *grunt* of gratification. "Ay, and further, there are *some* clever men that never can keep their own counsel; but are like an hen that has just laid an egg, and then goes foolishly cackling about everywhere, and then her egg is taken away; but *you* —" "Ha, ha!" laughed Quirk; that's *devilish* good, Gammon!—Capital! Gad, I think I see the hen! Ha, ha!" "Ha, ha!" echoed Gammon gently. "But to be serious, Mr. Quirk; what I was going to say was, that I thoroughly appreciate your admirable caution in not confiding to any one—no, not even to me—the exact means by which you intend to extricate us from our present dilemma." Here Quirk got very fidgety, and twirled his watch-key violently. "Hem! But—hem! Ay—a—a," he grunted, looking with an uneasy air at his calm astute companion; "I didn't mean so much as all *that*, either, Gammon; for two heads, in my opinion, are better than one. You *must* own that, Gam-

mon!" said he, not at all relishing the heavy burden of responsibility which he felt that Gammon was about to devolve upon his (Quirk's) shoulders exclusively.

"Tis undoubtedly rather a serious business on which we are now entering," said Gammon; "and I have always admired a saying which you years ago told me of that great man Machiavel—" [Oh, Gammon! Gammon! You well know that poor old Mr. Quirk never heard of the name of that same Machiavel till this moment!]"—"That 'when great affairs are stirring, a master-move should be confined to the great master-mind that projects it.' I understand! I see! I will not, therefore, inquire into the precise means by which I am satisfied you will make it appear, in due time (while I am engaged getting up the subordinate, but very harassing details of the general case), that *Henry Dreddlington died before the 7th of August 1742.*" Here, taking out his watch—"Bless me, Mr. Quirk, how time passes!—Two o'clock! I ought to have been at Messrs. Gregson's a quarter of an hour ago."

"Stop—a moment or two can't signify! It—it," said Quirk hesitatingly, "it was *you*, wasn't it, that thought of the tombstone?" "I!—my dear Mr. Quirk"—interrupted Gammon, with a look of astonishment and deference. "Come, come—honour among thieves, you know, Gammon!" said Quirk, trying to laugh.

"No—it shall never be said that I attempted to take the credit of——" commenced Gammon; when a clerk, entering, put an end to the colloquy between the partners, each of whom, presently, was sitting alone in his own room—for Gammon found that he was too late to think of keeping his engagement with Messrs. Gregson; if indeed he had ever made any—which, in fact, he had *not*. Mr. Quirk sat in a musing posture for nearly half an hour after he and Gammon had separated. "Gammon is a deep one! I'll be shot if ever there was his equal," said Quirk to himself, at length; and starting off his chair, with his hands crossed behind him, he walked softly to and fro. "I know what he's driving at—though he thought I didn't! He'd let me scratch my hands in getting the blackberries, and then he'd come smiling in to eat 'em! But—share and share alike—share profit, share danger, Master Gammon;—you may find that Caleb Quirk is a match for Oily Gammon—I'll have you in for it, one way or another!" Here occurred a long pause in his thoughts. "Really I doubt the thing's growing unmanageable—the prize can't be worth the risk!—*Risk*, indeed—fore Gad—it's neither more nor less than——" Here a certain picture hanging, covered with black crape, in the drawing-room at Alibi House, seemed to have glided down from its station, and to stand before his eyes with the crape drawn aside—a ghastly object—eugh! He shuddered, and involuntarily closed his eyes. "How devilish odd that I should just *now* have happened to think of it!" he inwardly exclaimed, sinking into his chair, in a sort of cold sweat.

"D—n the picture!" at length he exclaimed, almost aloud, getting more and more flustered—"I'll burn it! It sha'n't disgrace my drawing-room any longer!" Here Quirk almost fancied that some busy little fiend sat squatting before the grisly picture, writing the words "Caleb Quirk" at the bottom of it; and a sort of sickness came over him for a moment. Presently he started up, and took down one of several well-worn dingy-looking books that stood on the shelves—a volume of Burns' Justice. Resuming his seat, he put on his glasses, and with a little trepidation turned to the head "Forgery," and glanced over it, divided as it was into two great heads—"Forgery at Common Law, and Forgery by Statute," with many able observations of the learned compiler, and important "*cases*" cited. At length his eye lit upon a paragraph that seemed suddenly to draw his heart up into his throat, producing a sensation that made him involuntarily clap his hand upon his neck.

"Oh, Gammon!" he muttered, drawing off his glasses, sinking back in his chair, and looking towards the door that opened into Gammon's room; in which direction he extended his right arm, and shook his fist. "You *precious* villain!—I've an uncommon inclination," at length thought he, "to go down slap to Yorkshire—say nothing to anybody—make peace with the enemy, and knock up the whole thing!—For a couple of thousand pounds—a trifle to the Aubreys, I'm sure. Were I in his place, I shouldn't grudge it; and why should he?—By Jove," he got a little heated—"that *would* be, as Gammon has it, a master move! and confined, egad! to the master mind that thought of it!—Why should he ever know of the way in which the thing blew up?—Really 'twould be worth half the money to *do* Gammon so hollow for once—by George it *would*!—Gammon, that would slip Caleb Quirk's neck so slyly into the halter, indeed!"

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Quirk," said Gammon suddenly re-entering the room, after about an hour's absence, during which he too had, like his senior partner, been revolving many things in his mind—"it has occurred to me, that I had better immediately go down to Yatton, *alone*."

Hereat Mr. Quirk opened both his eyes and his mouth to their very widest; got very red in the face; and stared at his placid partner with a mingled expression of fear and wonder. "Hang me, Gammon!" at length he exclaimed, desperately, slapping his fist upon the table—"if I don't think you're the very devil himself!"—and he sank back in his chair, verily believing, in the momentary confusion of his thoughts, that what had been passing through his mind was known to Gammon; or that what had been passing through his (Quirk's) mind, had also been occurring to Gammon, who had resolved upon being beforehand in putting his purposes into execution. Gammon was at first completely confounded by Quirk's reception of him, and stood for a few moments, with his hands elevated, in silence. Then he approached the table, and his eye caught the well-thumbed volume of Burns' Justice, open at the head, "*FORGERS*!"—and the quick-sighted Gammon saw how matters stood at a glance—the process by which the result he had just witnessed had been arrived at.

"Well, Mr. Quirk, what new vagary now?" he inquired, with an air of smiling curiosity. "Vagary be —!" growled old Quirk sullenly, without moving in his chair.

Gammon stood for a moment or two eyeing him with a keen scrutiny. "What!" at length he inquired, good-humouredly, "do you then really grudge me any share in the little enterprise?"

"Eh?" quickly interrupted Quirk, pricking up his ears. "Do you intend to play *Machivel*! eh? What must you go down alone to Yatton for, Gammon?" continued Quirk anxiously. "Why, simply as a sort of pioneer—to reconnoitre the churchyard—eh? I thought it might have been of service! but if—" "Gammon, Gammon, your hand! I understand," replied Quirk, evidently vastly relieved—most cordially shaking the cold hand of Gammon. "But understand, Mr. Quirk," said he in a very peremptory manner, "no one upon earth is to know of my visit to Yatton except yourself."

He received a solemn pledge to that effect; and presently the partners separated, a little better satisfied with each other. Though not a word passed between them for several days afterwards on the topic chiefly discussed during the interview above described, the reader may easily imagine that neither of them dropped it from his thoughts. Mr. Quirk paid one or two visits to the neighbourhood of Houndsditch, (a perfect hot-bed of clients,) where resided two or three gentlemen of the Jewish persuasion, who had been placed, from time to time, under considerable obligations by the firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, in respect of professional services rendered both to themselves and to

their friends. One of them, in particular, had a painful consciousness that it was in old Mr. Quirk's power at any time, by a whisper, to place his—the aforesaid Israelite's—neck in an unsightly noose that every now and then might be seen dangling from a beam opposite Debtor's Door, Newgate, about eight o'clock in the morning; him, therefore, every consideration of interest and gratitude combined to render subservient to the reasonable wishes of Mr. Quirk. He was a most ingenious little fellow, and had a great taste for the imitative arts—so strong a taste, in fact, that it had once or twice placed him in some jeopardy with the Goths and Vandals of the law, who characterized the noble art in which he excelled by a very ugly and formidable word, and annexed the most barbarous penalties to its practice. What passed between him and old Quirk on the occasion of their interviews, I know not; but one afternoon, the latter, on returning to his office, without saying anything to anybody, having bolted the door, took out of his pocket several little pieces of paper, containing pretty little picturesque devices of a fragmentary character, with antique letters and figures on them—crumbling pieces of stone, some looking more and some less sunk in the ground, and overgrown with grass: possibly they were designs for ornaments to be added to that tasteful structure—*Alibi House*—possibly intended to grace Miss Quirk's album. However this might be, after he had looked at them and carefully compared them one with another for some time, he folded them up in a sheet of paper, sealed it up—with certainly not the steadiest hand in the word—and then deposited it in an iron safe.

CHAPTER XIII.

YATTON, the recovery of which was the object of these secret and formidable movements and preparations, not to say machinations, was all this while the scene of deep affliction. The lamentable condition of his mother plunged Mr. Aubrey, his wife and sister, into profounder grief than had been occasioned by the calamity which menaced them all in common. Poor Mrs. Aubrey, his wife, having been two or three weeks confined to her bed, during which time certain fond hopes of her husband had been blighted, was almost overpowered, when, languid and feeble, supported by Mr. Aubrey and Kate, she first entered the bed-room of the venerable sufferer. Kate was now pale, and somewhat thinner; her beautiful features exhibited a careworn expression; yet there was a serene lustre in her blue eye, and a composed resolution in her air, which bespoke the superiority of her soul. She had so schooled her sensibilities and feelings as to be able to maintain perfect cheerfulness and composure in her mother's presence, on occasions which forced her brother, and his shaken wife, to turn aside with an eye of agony—overcome by some touching speech or wayward action of the unconscious sufferer, who constantly imagined herself, poor soul! to be living over again her early married life; and that in her little grandchildren she beheld Mr. Aubrey and Kate as in their childhood! She would gently chide Mr. Aubrey, her husband, for his prolonged absence, asking many times a day whether he had returned from London. Every morning old Jacob Jones was shown into her chamber, at the hour at which he had been accustomed, in happier days, to attend upon her. The faithful old man's eyes would be blinded with tears, and his voice choked, as he was asked how Peggy got over her yesterday's journey; and listened to questions, messages, and directions, which had been familiar to him twenty years before, about villagers and tenants who had long lain mouldering in their humble graves—their way

thither cheered and smoothed by her Christian charity and benevolence ! 'Twas a touching sight to see her two grandchildren, in whose company she delighted, brought, with a timorous and half-reluctant air, into her presence. Though her mild features ever smiled upon them, and her voice was cheerful, still 'twas from a prostrate figure that never moved, and was always surrounded by calm, quiet figures, with sorrowful constraint in their countenances and gestures !

How woefully changed was everything in the once cheerful old Hall ! Mr. Aubrey sitting in the library, intently engaged upon books and papers—Mrs. Aubrey and Kate now and then, arm in arm, walking slowly up and down the galleries, or one of the rooms, or the hall, not with their former sprightly gaiety, but pensive, and often in tears, and then returning to the chamber of their suffering parent.

But little variation occurred, for several weeks, in the condition of Mrs. Aubrey, except that she grew visibly feebler. One morning, however, about six weeks after her seizure, from certain symptoms, the medical men intimated their opinion that some important change was on the eve of taking place, for which they prepared the family. She had been very restless during the night. Her voice, when she spoke, was feeble and tremulous ; and she would sigh, and shake her head mournfully. Old Jacob Jones, not being introduced at the accustomed hour, she asked for him. When he made his appearance, she gazed at him for a moment or two, with a puzzled eye, exclaiming "Jacob ! Jacob ! is it you ?" in a very low tone ; and then she closed her eyes, apparently falling asleep. Thus passed the day. Towards the evening, Dr. Tatham also, as had been his daily custom through her illness, appeared, and in a low tone read over the service for the visitation of the sick. Shortly afterwards Mr. Aubrey was obliged to quit the chamber, in order to attend to some very pressing matters of business ; and he had been engaged for nearly an hour, intending almost every moment to return to his mother's chamber, when Dr. Tatham entered, as Mr. Aubrey was subscribing his name to a letter, and, with a little earnestness, said—"Come, my friend, let us return to your mother ; methinks she is on the eve of some decisive change : the issue is with God." Within a very few moments they were both at the bedside of Mrs. Aubrey. Mr. Aubrey sat beside his wife close to his mother ; and taking her thin emaciated hand into his own, gently raised it to his lips. She seemed dozing ; but his action appeared to rouse her for a moment. Presently she fixed her eye upon him—its expression, the while, slowly but perceptibly changing, and exciting strange feelings within him. He trembled, and removed not his eye from hers. He turned very pale—for the whole expression of his mother's countenance, which was turned full towards him, was changing. Through the clouded windows of the falling fabric, behold ! its long-imprisoned tenant, *the soul*, had arisen from its torpor, and was looking at him. Reason was reappearing. It was, indeed, his mother, and *in her right mind*, that was gazing at him. He scarcely breathed. At length surprise and apprehension yielded before a gush of tenderness and love. With what an unutterable look was his mother at that moment regarding him ! His lips quivered—his eyes overflowed—and, as he felt her fingers very gently compressing his own, his tears fell down. Gently leaning forward, he kissed her cheek, and sank on one knee beside the bed.

"Is it you, my son ?" said she, in a very low tone, but in *her own* voice, and it stirred up instantly a thousand fond recollections, almost overpowering him. He kissed her hand with fervent energy, but spoke not. She continued gazing at him with mingled solemnity and fondness. Her eye seemed brightening as it remained fixed upon him. Again she spoke, in a very low but clear voice—every thrilling word being heard by every one around her—" *Or ever the silver chord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken*

at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern,—Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. It would be in vain to attempt to describe the manner in which these words were spoken; and which fell upon those who heard them as though they were listening to one from the dead.

“My mother!—my mother!” at length faltered Aubrey. “God bless thee, my son!” said she solemnly. “And Catharine, my daughter—God bless thee——” she presently added, gently turning round her head towards the quarter whence a stifled sob issued from Miss Aubrey, who rose, trembling, and, leaning over, kissed her mother. “Agnes, are you here—and your little ones?—God bless——” Her voice got fainter, and her eyes closed. Mr. Whateley gave her a few drops of ether, and she presently revived.

“God hath been very good to you, madam,” said Dr. Tatham, observing her eye fixed upon him, “to restore you thus to your children.” “I have been long absent—long!—I wake, my children, but to bid you farewell, for ever, upon earth.” “Say not so, my mother—my precious mother;” exclaimed her son, in vain endeavouring to suppress his emotions. “I do, my son! Weep not for me; I am old, and am summoned away from among you”—She ceased, as if from exhaustion; and no one spoke for some minutes.

“It may be that God hath roused me, as it were, from the dead, to comfort my sorrowful children with words of hope,” said Mrs. Aubrey, with much more power and distinctness than before. “Hope ye, then, in God; for ye shall yet praise Him who is the health of your countenance, and your God!” “We will remember, my mother, your words!” faltered her son. “Yes, my son—if days of darkness be at hand”—she ceased. Again Mr. Whateley placed to her white lips a glass with some reviving fluid—looking ominously at Mr. Aubrey, as he found that she continued insensible. Miss Aubrey sobbed audibly; indeed, all present were powerfully affected. Again Mrs. Aubrey revived, and swallowed a few drops of wine and water. A heavenly serenity diffused itself over her emaciated features.

“We shall meet again, my loves!—I can no longer see you with the eyes of”—Mr. Whateley observing a sudden change, came nearer to her. “Peace! peace!” she murmured almost inarticulately. A dead silence ensued, interrupted only by smothered sobs. Her children sank on their knees, and buried their faces in their hands, trembling.

Mr. Whateley made a silent signal to Dr. Tatham that life had ceased—that the beloved spirit had passed away. “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!” said Dr. Tatham, with tremulous solemnity. Mrs. Aubrey and Miss Aubrey, no longer able to restrain their feelings, wept bitterly; and, overpowered with grief, were supported out of the room by Dr. Tatham and Mr. Aubrey. As soon as it was known that the venerable mother of Mr. Aubrey was no more, universal reverence was testified for her memory, and sympathy for the afflicted survivors, by even those, high and low, in the remoter parts of the neighbourhood who had no personal acquaintance with the family. Two or three days afterwards, the undertaker, who had received orders from Mr. Aubrey to provide a simple and inexpensive funeral, submitted to him a list of more than thirty names of the nobility and gentry of the country, who had sent to him to know whether it would be agreeable to the family for them to be allowed to attend Mrs. Aubrey’s remains to the grave. After much consideration, Mr. Aubrey accepted of this spontaneous tribute of respect to the memory of his mother. ’Twas a memorable and melancholy day on which the interment took place—one never to be forgotten at Yatton. What person was there, for miles around, who could not speak of the courtesies, the charities, the goodness of Madam Aubrey?

“*When the ear heard her, then it blessed her; and when the eye saw her, it*

gave witness to her: Because she delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon her, and she caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. She was eyes to the blind, and feet was she to the lame. She was a mother to the poor."—

Pale as death, the chief mourner, wrapped in his black cloak, is stepping into the mourning-coach. No one speaks to him: his face is buried in his handkerchief; his heart seems breaking. He thinks of her whose dear dust is before him;—then of the beloved beings whom he has left alone in their agony till his return—his wife and sister. As they quit the gates, carriage after carriage follows in the rear; and the sorrowful crowd increases around them. Many have in their hands the bibles and prayer-books which had been given them by her who now lies in yonder hearse; and a few can recollect the day when the late lord of Yatton led her along from the church to the Hall, his young and blooming bride—in pride and joy—and they are now going to lay her beside him again. They enter the little churchyard, and are met by good Dr. Tatham, in his surplice, bare-headed, and with book in hand; with full eye and quivering lip he slowly precedes the body into the church. His voice frequently trembles, and sometimes he pauses while reading the service. Now they are standing bare-headed at the vault's mouth—the last sad rites are being performed; and probably, as is thinking the chief mourner, over the last of his race who will rest in that tomb!

Thus died, and was buried, Madam Aubrey; *and she is not yet forgotten.*

How desolate seemed the Hall, the next morning, to the bereaved inmates, as dressed in deep mourning, they met at the cheerless breakfast table! Aubrey kissed his wife and sister—who could hardly answer his brief inquiries.

Great troubles seem coming upon them; and now that *they have buried their dead out of their sight*, and when time shall begin to pour his balm into their present smarting wounds, I doubt not that they will look those troubles in the face, calmly and with fortitude, not forgetful of the last words of her for whom they now mourn so bitterly, and whom, beloved and venerable being! God hath mercifully taken away from evil days that are to come.

After much and anxious consideration, they resolved to go, on the ensuing Sunday morning, to church, where neither Mrs. Aubrey nor Kate had been since the illness of her mother. The little church was crowded; almost everyone present, besides wearing a saddened countenance, exhibited some outward mark of respect, in their dress—some badge of mourning—such as their little means admitted of. The pulpit and reading-desk were hung in black, as also was Mr. Aubrey's pew—an object of deep interest to the congregation, who expected to see at least *some* member of the family at the Hall. They were not disappointed. A little before Dr. Tatham took his place in the reading-desk, the well-known sound of the family carriage-wheels was heard, as it drew up before the gate: and presently, Mr. Aubrey appeared at the church door, with his wife and sister on either arm; all of them, of course, in the deepest mourning—Mrs. and Miss Aubrey's countenances concealed beneath their long crape veils. For some time after taking their seats, they seemed oppressed with emotion, evidently weeping. Mr. Aubrey, however, exhibited great composure, though his countenance bore the traces of the suffering he had undergone. Mrs. Aubrey seldom rose from her seat; but Kate stood up, from time to time, with the rest of the congregation; her white handkerchief, however, might be seen frequently raised to her eyes, beneath her black veil. As the service went on, she seemed to have struggled with some success against her feelings. To relieve herself for a moment from its oppressive closeness, she gently drew aside her veil; and thus, for a few minutes,

exhibited a countenance inexpressibly beautiful. She could not, however, long bear to face a congregation, every one of whom she felt to be looking on her, and those beside her, with affectionate sympathy; and rather quickly drew her veil again over her face, without again removing it. There was one person present, on whom the brief glimpse of her beauty had produced a prodigious impression. As he gazed at her, the colour gradually deserted his cheek; and his eye remained fixed upon her, even after she had drawn down her veil. He experienced emotions such as he had never known before. *So that was Miss Aubrey!*

Mr. Gammon—for he it was, and he had gone thither under the expectation of seeing, for the first time, some of the Aubrey family—generally passed for a cold-blooded person; and in fact few men living had more control over their feelings, or more systematically checked any manifestations of them; but there was something in the person and circumstances of Miss Aubrey—for by an hurried inquiry of the person next to him he learned that it was she—which excited new feelings in him.

“Good heavens! how very—*very* beautiful she is!” said he to himself, as, the service over, her graceful figure, following her brother and his wife with slow sad step, approached the pew in which he was standing, on her way to the door. He felt a sort of cold shudder, as her black dress rustled past, actually touching him. What was he doing and meditating against that lovely being? And for whom—disgusting reptile!—for Titmouse? He almost blushed with a conflict of emotions, as he followed almost immediately after Miss Aubrey, never losing sight of her till her brother, having handed her into the carriage, got in after her, and they drove off towards the Hall.

The reader will not be at a loss to account for the presence of Gammon on this occasion, nor to connect it with a great trial at the approaching York assizes. As he walked back to Grilston to his solitary dinner, he was lost in thought; and on arriving at the inn, repaired at once to his room, where he found a copy of the *Sunday Flash*, which had, according to orders, been sent to him from town, under his assumed name, “Gibson.” He ate but little, and that mechanically; and seemed to feel, for once, little or no interest in his newspaper. One thing was clear, that from that moment Miss Aubrey formed a new element in Mr. Gammon’s calculations; and for aught I know, may occasion very different results from those originally contemplated by that calm and crafty person.

As it proved a moonlight night, he resolved at once to set about the important business which had brought him into Yorkshire; and for that purpose set off about eight o’clock on his walk to Yatton. About ten o’clock he might have been seen gliding into the churchyard, like a dangerous snake. The moon continued to shine—and at intervals with brightness sufficient for his purpose, which was simply to reconnoitre, as closely as possible, the little churchyard—to ascertain what it might contain, and *what were its capabilities*. At length he approached the old yew-tree, against whose huge trunk he leaned with folded arms, apparently in a reverie. Hearing a noise as of some one opening the gate by which he had entered, he glided further into the gloom behind him; and turning his head in the direction whence the sound came, he beheld some one entering the churchyard. His heart beat quickly; and he suspected that he had been watched: yet there was surely no harm in being seen, at ten o’clock at night, looking about him in a country churchyard. It was a gentleman who entered, dressed in deep mourning; and Gammon quickly recognised in him Mr. Aubrey—the brother of her whose beautiful image still shone before his mind’s eye. What could he be wanting there?—at that time of night? Gammon was not kept long in doubt; for the stranger slowly bent his steps towards a large high tomb, in fact the central object,

next to the yew-tree, in the churchyard—and stood gazing at it in silence for some time.

"That is, no doubt, where Mrs. Aubrey was buried the other day," thought he, watching the movements of the stranger, who presently raised his handkerchief to his eyes, and for some moments seemed indulging in great grief. Gammon distinctly heard either a sob or a sigh. "He must have been very fond of her," thought Gammon. "Well, if we succeed, the excellent old lady will have escaped a great deal of trouble—that's all." "If *we* succeed!" That reminded him of what he had for a few moments lost sight of, namely, his own object in coming thither; and he felt a sudden chill of remorse, which increased upon him till he almost trembled, as his eye continued fixed on Mr. Aubrey, and he thought also of Miss Aubrey—and the misery—the utter ruin into which he was seeking to plunge them both—the unhallowed means which they—which *he*—contemplated resorting to for that purpose.

Gammon's condition was becoming every moment more serious; for VIRTUE, in the shape of Miss Aubrey, began to shine every moment in more radiant loveliness before him—and he almost felt an inclination to sacrifice every person connected with the enterprise in which he was engaged, if it would give him a chance of winning the favour of Miss Aubrey. Presently, however, Mr. Aubrey, evidently heaving a deep sigh, bent his steps slowly back again, and quitted the churchyard. Gammon watched his figure out of sight, and then, for the first time since Mr. Aubrey's appearance, breathed freely. Relieved from the pressure of his presence, Gammon began to take calmer and juster views of his position; and he reflected, that if he pushed on the present affair to a successful issue, he should be much more likely, than by prematurely ending it, to gain his objects. He therefore resumed his survey of the scene around him; and which presented appearances highly satisfactory, judging from the expression which now and then animated his countenance. At length he wandered round to the other end of the church, where a crumbling wall, half-covered with ivy, indicated that there had formerly stood some building apparently of earlier date than the church. Such was the fact. Gammon soon found himself standing in a sort of inclosure, which had once been the site of an old chapel. And here he had not been long making his observations, before he achieved a discovery of so extraordinary a nature; one so unlikely, under the circumstances, to have happened; one so calculated to baffle ordinary calculations concerning the course of events, that the reader may well disbelieve what I am going to tell him, and treat it as absurdly improbable. In short, not to keep him in suspense, Gammon positively discovered evidence of the death of Harry Dreddlington in his father's lifetime; by means of just such a looking tombstone as he had long imagined to himself; and as he had resolved that old Quirk should have got prepared, before the cause came into court. He almost stumbled over it. 'Twas an old slanting stone, scarce two feet above the ground, partly covered with moss, and partly hid by rubbish and old damp grass. The moon shone brightly enough to enable Gammon, kneeling down, to decipher, beyond all doubt, what was requisite to establish that part of the case which had been wanting. For a moment or two he was disposed to doubt whether he was not dreaming. When, at length, he took out pencil and paper, his hands trembled so much that he felt some difficulty in making an exact copy of the inestimable inscription. Having done this, he drew a long breath as he replaced the pencil and paper in his pocket-book, and almost fancied he heard a whispering sound in the air—"Verdict for the plaintiff." Quitting the churchyard, he walked back to Grilston at a much quicker rate than that at which he had come, his discovery having wonderfully elated him, and pushed all other thoughts entirely out of his mind. But, thought he, doubtless the other side are aware of the existence of this tombstone—they

can hardly be supposed ignorant of it; they must have looked up their evidence as well as we—and their attention has been challenged to the existence or non-existence of proof of the time of the death of Harry Dreddlington;—well—if they are aware of it, they know that it cuts the ground from under them, and turns their conveyance, on which, doubtless, they are relying, into waste paper; if they are *not*, and are under the impression that that deed is valid and effectual, our proof will fall on them like a thunderbolt. “Gad,”—he held his breath, and stopped in the middle of the road—“how immensely important is this little piece of evidence! Why, if they knew of it—why in Heaven’s name is it there still? What easier than to have got rid of it?—why, they may still: what can that stupid Parkinson have been about? Yet, is it because it has become unimportant, on account of their being in possession of other evidence? What *can* they have to set against so plain a case as ours is, with this evidence? Gad, I’ll not lose one day’s time; but I’ll have half-a-dozen competent witnesses to inspect, and speak to that same tombstone in court.” Such were some of the thoughts which passed through his mind as he hastened homeward; and on his arrival, late as it was—only the yawning ostler being up to let him in—he sat down to write a letter off to Mr. Quirk, and made it into a parcel to go by the mail in the morning, and acquainting him with the truly providential discovery he had just made, and urging him to set about getting up the briefs, for the trial, without delay; he, himself, purposing to stop at Grilston a day or two longer, to complete one or two other arrangements of an important nature. As soon as Mr. Quirk had read this letter, he devoutly thanked God for His goodness; and, hurrying to his strong-box, unlocked it, took out a small sealed packet, and committed it to the flames.

Mr. Aubrey, as soon as he had recovered from the first shock occasioned by the communication by Mr. Parkinson of the proceedings against him, set about acquainting himself, as minutely as he could, with the true state of the case. He had requested Mr. Parkinson to obtain from one of the counsel in London, Mr. Crystal, a full account of the case, in an elementary form, for his own guidance; and on obtaining a remarkably clear and luminous statement, and also consulting the various authorities cited in it—such, at least, as could be supplied to him by Mr. Parkinson—the vigorous practical understanding of Mr. Aubrey, aided by his patient application, soon mastered the whole case, and enabled him to appreciate the peril in which he was placed. By what means his opponents had obtained their clue to the state of his title, neither he nor any of his advisers could frame a plausible conjecture. It was certainly possible that Stephen Dreddlington, who was known to have been a man, like his uncle Harry, of wild and eccentric habits, and to have been supposed to leave no issue, might have married privately some woman of inferior station, and left issue by her, who, living in obscurity, and at a distance from the seat of the family property, could have no opportunity of inquiring into or ascertaining their position with reference to the estates, till some acute and enterprising attorneys, like Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, happening to get hold of them, and family papers in their possession, had taken up their case. When, with impressions such as these, Mr. Aubrey perused and reperused the opinions of the conveyancer, given on the occasion of his (Mr. Aubrey’s) marriage, he was confounded at the supineness and indifference which he had even twice exhibited, and felt disposed now greatly to overvalue the importance of every adverse circumstance. The boldness, again, and systematic energy with which the case of the claimant was prosecuted, and the eminent legal opinions which were alleged, and with every appearance of truth, to concur in his favour, afforded additional grounds for rational apprehension. He looked the danger, however, full in the face, and as far as lay in his power, prepared for the evil day which might so soon come upon him. Certain extensive and somewhat

costly alterations which he had been on the point of commencing at Yatton, he abandoned. But for the earnest interference of friends, he would at once have given up his establishment in Grosvenor Street, and applied for the Chiltern Hundreds, in order to retire from political life. Considering the possibility of his soon being declared the wrongful holder of the property, he contracted his expenditure as far as he could, without challenging unnecessary public attention; and paid into his banker's hands all his Christmas rents, sacredly resolving to abstain from drawing out one farthing of what might soon be proved to belong to another. At every point occurred the dreadful question—if I am declared never to have been the rightful owner of the property, how am I to discharge my frightful liabilities to him who is? Mr. Aubrey had nothing except the Yatton property. He had but an insignificant sum in the funds; Mrs. Aubrey's settlement was out of lands at Yatton, as also was the little income bequeathed to Kate by her father. Could anything, now, be conceived more dreadful, under these circumstances, than the mere danger—the slightest probability—of their being deprived of Yatton?—and with a debt of at the very least SIXTY THOUSAND POUNDS, due to him who had been wrongfully kept out of his property? It was long before the real nature and extent of his danger became known amongst his friends and neighbours. When, however, they were made aware of it, an extraordinary interest and sympathy were excited throughout almost the whole county. Whenever his attorney, Mr. Parkinson, appeared in public, he was besieged by most anxious inquiries concerning his distinguished client, whose manly modesty and fortitude, under the pressure of his sudden and almost unprecedented difficulty and peril, endeared him more than ever to all who had an opportunity of appreciating his position. With what intense and absorbing interest were the ensuing assizes looked for! At length they arrived.

The ancient city of York exhibited, on the commission day of the Spring Assizes for the year 18—, the usual scene of animation and excitement. The Judges were Lord Widdrington, the Lord Chief-Justice of the King's Bench, and Mr. Justice Grayley, a puisne judge of the same court—both admirable lawyers. The former was possessed of the more powerful intellect. He was what may be called a great scientific lawyer, referring everything to *principle* as extracted from precedent. Mr. Justice Grayley was almost unrivalled in his knowledge of the *details* of the law; his governing maxim being *ita lex scripta*. Here his knowledge was equally minute and accurate, and most readily applied to every case brought before him. Lord Widdrington in temper was stern, arbitrary, and overbearing, and his manners were disfigured not a little by coarseness; while his companion was a man of exemplary amiability, affability, and forbearance. Lord Widdrington presided at the Civil Court (where, of course, would come on the important cause in which we are interested), and Mr. Justice Grayley in the Criminal Court.

Soon after the sitting of the court, on the ensuing morning—"Will your Lordship allow me," rose and inquired the sleek, smiling, and portly Mr. Subtle, dead silence prevailing as soon as he had mentioned the name of the cause about which he was inquiring, "to call your attention to a cause of *Doe on the demise of Titmouse v. Jolter*—a special jury cause, in which there are a great many witnesses to be examined on both sides—and to ask that a day may be fixed for it to come on?" "Whom do you appear for, Mr. Subtle?" inquired his Lordship. "For the plaintiff, my Lord." "And who appears for the defendant?" "The Attorney-General leads for the defendant, my Lord," replied Mr. Sterling, who, with Mr. Crystal, was also retained for the defendant.

After due consultation, Monday week was agreed upon by the parties, and fixed by his lordship, for the trial of the cause. During the Sunday preceding it, York was crowded with persons of the highest distinction from all parts of

the county, who felt interested in the result of the great cause of the assizes. About mid-day a dusty travelling carriage-and-four dashed into the streets from the London road, and drove up to the principal inn; it contained the Attorney-General (who just finished reading his brief as he entered York) and his clerk. The Attorney-General was a man of striking and highly intellectual countenance; but he looked, on alighting, something fatigued with his long journey. He was a man of extraordinary natural talents, and also a first-rate lawyer—one whose right to take the woolsack, whenever it should become vacant, was recognized by all the profession. His professional celebrity, and his coming down special on the present occasion, added to the circumstance of his being well-known to be a personal friend of his client, Mr. Aubrey—whence it might be inferred that his great powers would be exerted to their utmost—was well calculated to enhance the interest, if that were possible, of the occasion which had brought him down at so great an expense, and to sustain so heavy a responsibility as the conduct of a cause of such magnitude.

He came to lead against a formidable opponent. Mr. Subtle was the leader of the Northern circuit, a man of matchless tact and practical sagacity, and most consummately skilful in the conduct of a cause. The only thing he ever looked at was the verdict, to the gaining of which he directed all his energies, and sacrificed every other consideration. As for display, he despised it. A *speech*, as such, was his aversion. He entered into a friendly, but exquisitely crafty *conversation* with the jury; for he was so quick at perceiving the effect of his address on the mind of each of the twelve, and dexterous in accommodating himself to what he detected to be the passing mood of each, that they felt as if they were all the while reasoning with, and being convinced by him. His placid, smiling, handsome countenance, his gentlemanly bearing and insinuating address, full of good-natured cheerful confidence in his cause, were irresistible. As a *nisi prius* leader he was unrivalled, as well in stating as in arguing a case, as well in examining as in cross-examining a witness.

Next came Mr. Quicksilver, a man of great but wild energy, who received what may be called a *muffling* retainer. What a contrast was he to Mr. Subtle! The first and the last thing he thought of in a cause was—himself. His delight was to make the jury feel as if a whirlwind were raging about them, and he the spirit who had raised it. His object was either to dazzle or overpower them. This was the strange, noisy object, flinging about wildly, in all directions, the firebrands and arrows of sarcasm and invective, which occupied their eye and ear till he had ceased; neither he nor they were thinking all the while of his dismayed and injured client, till reminded of him by the adverse charge of the judge, accompanied by a slight sneer and shrug of the shoulders from Mr. Subtle. Why, then, was such a man retained in the cause? 'Twas a fancy of Quirk's, a vast political admirer of Quicksilver's, who had made one or two most splendid speeches for him in libel cases brought against the *Sunday Flash*. Gammon most earnestly expostulated, but Quirk was inexorable; and himself carried his retainer to Mr. Quicksilver. Gammon, however, was somewhat consoled by the reflection that this wild elephant would be, in a manner, held in check by Mr. Subtle and Mr. Lynx, who, he hoped, would prevent any serious mischief from happening. Lynx possessed the qualities which his name would suggest to you. I have partly described him already. He was a man to *steer* a leader, if ever that leader should get, for an instant, on the wrong tack, or be uncertain as to his course. His suggestion and interference—rare, indeed, with such a man as Mr. Subtle, incessant with Mr. Quicksilver—were always worth attending to, and consequently received with deference.

For Mr. Aubrey also was retained a formidable bar. Mr. Attorney-General was a man much superior, in point of intellect and legal knowledge, to Mr.

Subtle. His mind was distinguished by its tranquil power. He had a rare and invaluable faculty of arraying before his mind's eye all the facts and bearings of the most intricate case, and contemplating them, as it were, not successively, but simultaneously. His perception was quick as light; and, at the same time—rare, most rare accompaniment!—his judgment sound, his memory signally retentive. Inferior, possibly, to Mr. Subtle in rapid and delicate appreciation of momentary advantages, he was sagacious where Mr. Subtle was only ingenious.

Mr. Sterling, the second counsel for the defendant, was a king's counsel, and a rival of Mr. Subtle upon the circuit. He was a man of great power; and, on important occasions, no man could acquit himself with more distinction. As a speaker, he was eloquent and impressive, perhaps deficient in vivacity; but he was a man of clear and powerful intellect; prompt in seizing the bearings of a case; a capital lawyer; and possessing, even on the most trying occasions, imperturbable self-possession. Mr. Crystal, with some faults of manner and bearing, was an honourable high-minded man; clear-sighted and strong-headed; an accurate and ready lawyer; vigilant and acute.

About eight o'clock on the Sunday evening, at Mr. Subtle's lodgings, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, accompanied by Mr. Mortmain, whom they had brought down to watch the case, made their appearance shortly after Mr. Quicksilver and Mr. Lynx.

"Our case seems complete, *now*," said Mr. Subtle, casting a penetrating and most significant glance at Quirk and Gammon, and then at his juniors, to whom, before the arrival of their clients and Mr. Mortmain, he had been mentioning the essential link which, a month before, he had pointed out as missing, and the marvellous good-fortune by which they had been able to supply it at the eleventh hour.

"That tombstone's a godsend, Subtle, isn't it?" said Quicksilver with a grim smile. Lynx neither smiled nor spoke. He was a very matter-of-fact person. So as the case came out clear and nice in court, he cared about nothing more. But whatever might be the insinuation or suspicion implied in the observation of Mr. Subtle, the reader, must by this time, be well aware how little it was warranted by the facts.

"By the way, gentlemen," said Mr. Subtle, suddenly, addressing Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, "how do *we* come to know anything about the mortgage executed by Harry Dreddington?" "Oh! *that*, you know," replied Quirk quickly, "we first got scent of in Mr. ———" Here he paused suddenly, and turned quite red. "It was suggested," said Gammon calmly, "by one of the gentlemen whose opinions we have taken in the case—I forget by whom—that, from some recital, it was probable that there existed such an instrument; and that put us on making inquiry." "Nothing more likely," added Mortmain, "than that it, or an abstract, or minute of it, should get into Stephen Dreddington's hands." "Ah! well! well!—I must say there's rather an air of mystery about the case. But—about that tombstone—what sort of witnesses will speak——"

"Will that evidence be requisite," inquired Lynx, "in the plaintiff's case? All *we* shall have to do, will be to prove the fact that Harry died without issue, of which there's satisfactory evidence; and as to the *time* of his death, that will become material only if *they* put in the conveyance of Harry."

"True—true; ah! I'll turn that over in my mind. Rely upon it, I'll give Mr. Attorney-General as little to lay hold of as possible. Thank you, Mr. Lynx, for the hint. Now, gentlemen, one other question—What *kind of looking* people are the witnesses who prove the later steps of the pedigree of Mr. Titmouse? Respectable? eh?—You know a good deal will depend on the *credit* they may obtain with the jury." "They're very decent creditable

persons, you will find, sir," said Gammon. "Good, good. Who struck the special jury?" "We did, sir." "Well, I must say, that was a *very* prudent step for *you* to take! considering the rank in life and circumstances of the respective parties! However, to be sure, if *you* didn't, they would—so—well; good-night, gentlemen, good-night." So the consultation broke up; and Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap returned home to their inn, in a very serious and anxious mood.

"You're a marvellous prudent person, Mr. Quirk," said Gammon, in a somewhat fierce whisper, as they walked along, "I suppose you would have gone on to explain the little matter of Steggars, and so have had our briefs thrown at our heads——" "Well, well, that *was* a slip." Here they reached their inn. Titmouse was staying there; and in Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's absence, he had got very drunk, and was quarrelling under the archway with Boots; so they ordered him to bed, they themselves sitting up till a very late hour in the morning.

The consultation at the Attorney-General's had taken place about three o'clock in the afternoon, within an hour after his arrival; and had been attended by Messrs. Sterling, Crystal, and Mansfield,—by Mr. Runnington, and Mr. Parkinson, and by Mr. Aubrey, whom the Attorney-General received with the most earnest expressions of sympathy and friendship; listening to every question and every observation of his with the utmost deference.

"It would be both idle and unkind to disguise from you, Aubrey," said he, "that our position is somewhat precarious. It depends entirely on the chance we may have of breaking down the plaintiff's case; for we have but a slender case of our own. I suppose they can bring proof of the death of Harry Dreddlington in his father's lifetime?"

"Oh yes, sir!" answered Mr. Parkinson, "there is an old tombstone behind Yatton church which establishes that fact beyond all doubt; and a week or two ago no fewer than five or six persons have been carefully inspecting it; doubtless they will be called as witnesses to-morrow."

"I feared as much. Then are ours no more than watching briefs. Depend upon it, they would not have carried on the affair with so high a hand, if they had not pretty firm ground under foot! Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap are tolerably well known in town—not *over*-scrupulous, eh, Mr. Runnington?" "Indeed, Mr. Attorney, you are right. I don't doubt they are prepared to go all lengths." "Well, we'll sift their evidence pretty closely, at any rate. So you really have reason to fear, as you intimated when you entered the room, that they have valid evidence of Stephen Dreddlington having left issue?"

"Mr. Snap told me," said Mr. Parkinson, "this morning, that they would prove issue of Stephen Dreddlington, and issue of that issue, as clean as a whistle—that was his phrase." "We mustn't take all for gospel that *he* would say." "They've got two houses filled with witnesses, I understand," said Mr. Runnington. "Do they seem Yorkshire people, or strangers?" "Why, most of them that I have seen," replied Parkinson, "seem strangers." "Ah, they will prove, I suppose, the later steps of the pedigree, when Stephen Dreddlington married at a distance from his native county."

Then they entered into a very full and minute examination of the case; after which,—“Well,” said the Attorney-General, evidently fatigued with his long journey, and rising from his chair, “we must trust to what will turn up in the chapter of accidents to-morrow. I shall be expected to dine with the bar to-day,” he added; “but immediately after dinner—say at seven o'clock, I shall be here, and at your service, if anything should be required.” Then the consultation broke up. Mr. Aubrey had, at their earnest entreaty, brought Mrs. Aubrey and Kate from Yatton, on Saturday; for they declared themselves unable to bear the dreadful suspense in which they should be left at Yatton.

Yielding, therefore, to these their very reasonable wishes, he had engaged private lodgings at the outskirts of the town. On quitting the consultation, which, without at the same time affecting over-strictness, he had regretted being fixed for Sunday—but the necessity of the case appeared to warrant it—he repaired to the magnificent minster, where the evening prayers were being read, and where were Mrs. Aubrey and Kate. They were chanting the prayers as he entered, and was placed in a stall nearly opposite to where those whom he loved so fondly were standing. The psalms allotted for the evening were those in which the royal sufferer, David, was pouring forth the deepest sorrows of his heart; and their appropriateness to his own state of mind, added to the effect produced by the melting melody in which they were conveyed to his ears, excited in him, and, he perceived, also in those opposite, the deepest emotion. The glorious pile was beginning to grow dusky with the stealing shadows of evening; and the solemn and sublime strains of the organ, during the playing of the anthem, filled the minds of all present who had any pretensions to sensibility, with mingled feelings of tenderness and awe. Those in whom we are so deeply interested, felt their minds at once subdued and elevated; and as they quitted the darkening fabric, through which the pealing tones of the organ were yet reverberating, they could not help inquiring, Should they ever enter it again,—and in what altered circumstances might it be?

To return, however—though it is, indeed, like descending from the holy mountain into the bustle and hubbub of the city at its foot—Mr. Parkinson, being most unexpectedly and unfortunately summoned to Grilston that afternoon, in order to send up some deeds of one of his distinguished clients to London, for the purpose of immediately effecting a mortgage, set off in a post-chaise, at top speed, in a very unenviable frame of mind; and by seven o'clock was seated in his office at Grilston, busily turning over a great number of deeds and papers, in a large tin-case, with the words "Right Honourable the Earl of Yelverton," painted on the outside. Having turned over almost everything inside, and found all that he wanted, he was going to toss back again all the deeds which were not requisite for his immediate purpose, when he happened to see one lying at the very bottom, which he had not before observed. It was not a large, but an old deed; and he took it up and hastily examined it.

We have seen a piece of unexpected good fortune on the part of Gammon and his client; and the reader will not be disappointed at finding something of a similar kind befalling Mr. Aubrey, even at the eleventh hour. Mr. Parkinson's journey, which he had execrated a hundred times over as he came down, produced a discovery which made him tremble all over with agitation and excitement, and begin to look upon it as almost owing to an interference of Providence. The deed he looked at bore an endorsement of the name of "*Dreddington*." After a hasty glance over its contents, he tried to recollect by what accident a document, belonging to Mr. Aubrey, could have found its way into the box containing Lord Yelverton's deeds; and it at length occurred to him that, about a twelvemonth before, Mr. Aubrey had proposed advancing several thousand pounds to Lord Yelverton, on mortgage of a portion of his lordship's property; but which negotiation had afterwards been broken off; that Mr. Aubrey's title-deeds happened to be at the same time open and loose in his office; and he recollected having considerable trouble in separating the respective documents which had got mixed together. This one, after all, had been by some accident overlooked, till it turned up in this most timely and extraordinary manner! Having hastily effected the object which had brought him back to Grilston, he ordered a post-chaise and four, and within a quarter-of-an-hour was thundering back, at top speed, on his way to York, which, the horses reeking and foaming, he reached a little after ten o'clock. He jumped

out, with the precious deed in his pocket, the instant that his chaise-door was opened, and ran off, without saying more than—"I'm gone to the Attorney-General's." This was heard by many passers-by and persons standing round; and it spread far and wide that something of the utmost importance had transpired, with reference to the great ejectment cause of Mr. Aubrey. Soon afterwards, messengers and clerks, belonging to Mr. Runnington and Mr. Parkinson, were to be seen running to and fro, summoning Mr. Sterling, Mr. Crystal, Mr. Mansfield, and also Mr. Aubrey, to a second consultation at the Attorney-General's. About eleven o'clock they were all assembled. The deed which had occasioned all this excitement, was one calculated indeed to produce that effect; and it filled the minds of all present with astonishment and delight. In a word, it was a deed of confirmation by old Dreddlington, the father of Harry Dreddlington, of the conveyance by the latter to Geoffry Dreddlington, who, in the manner already mentioned to the reader, had got an assignment of that conveyance to himself. After the Attorney-General had satisfied himself as to the account to be given of the deed—the custody from whence it came, namely, the attorney for the defendant; Mr. Parkinson undertaking to swear, without any hesitation, that whatever deeds of Mr. Aubrey's he possessed, he had taken from the muniment-room at Yatton—the second consultation broke up. Mr. Aubrey, on hearing the nature and effect of the instrument explained by the Attorney-General and Mr. Mansfield, and all his counsel, in short concurring in opinion as to the triumphant effect which this instrument would produce on the morrow, may be pardoned for regarding it, in the excitement of the moment, as almost a direct interference of Providence.

A few minutes before nine o'clock on the ensuing morning, the occasional shrill blasts of the trumpets announced that the judges were on their way to the castle, the approaches to which were crowded with carriages and pedestrians of a highly respectable appearance. As the castle clock finished striking nine, Lord Widdrington took his seat, and the swearing of the special jury commenced. The court was crowded almost to suffocation; all the chief places being filled with persons of distinction in the county. The benches on each side of the judge were occupied by ladies, who—especially the Countess of Oldacre and Lady De la Zouch—evinced a painful degree of anxiety and excitement in their countenances and demeanour. The bar also mustered in great force; the crown court being quite deserted, although a great murder case was going on there. The civil court was on the present occasion the point of attraction, not only on account of the interesting nature of the case to be tried, but of the keen contest that was expected between the Attorney-General and Mr. Subtle. The former, as he entered—his commanding features gazed at by many an anxious eye with hope, and a feeling that on his skill and learning depended that day the destination of the Yatton property—bowed to the judge, and then nodded and shook hands with several of the counsel nearest to him; then he sat down, and opening his bag, took out his huge brief, and began turning over its leaves with a calm and attentive air, occasionally turning round and conversing with his juniors. Every one present observed that the defendant's counsel and attorneys wore the confident looks of winning men; while their opponents, quick-sighted enough, also observed the circumstance, and looked, on that account alone, a shade more anxious than when they had entered the court. Mr. Subtle requested Gammon, whose ability he had soon detected, to sit immediately beneath him; next to Gammon sat Quirk, then Snap, and beside him Mr. Titmouse, with a staring sky-blue flowered silk handkerchief round his neck, a gaudy waistcoat, a tight surtout, and white kid gloves. He looked exceedingly pale, and dared hardly interchange a word with even Snap, who was just as irritable and excited as his senior partners. It was quickly known all over the court who Titmouse was. Mr. Aubrey

scarcely showed himself in court all day, though he stood at the door near the bench, and could hear all that passed; Lord De la Zouch and one or two other personal friends standing with him, engaged, from time to time, in anxious conversation.

The jury having been sworn, Mr. Lynx rose, and in a few hurried sentences, to the lay audience utterly unintelligible, intimated the nature of the pleadings in the cause. The Attorney-General then rose, and requested that all the witnesses might leave the court. As soon as the little disturbance occasioned by this move had ceased, Mr. Subtle rose, and in a low but distinct tone said,

"May it please your Lordship—Gentlemen of the Jury,—In this cause I have the honour to appear before you as counsel for the plaintiff; and it now becomes my duty to state, as briefly as I can, the nature of his case. It is impossible, gentlemen, not to notice the unusual interest excited by the cause; and which may be accounted for by the very large estates in this county which are sought this day to be transferred to a comparative stranger, from the family who have long enjoyed them, and of whom I am anxious to say everything respectful; for you will very soon find that the name on the record is that of only the nominal defendant; and although all that is *professed* to be this day sought for, is a very trifling portion of the property, your verdict will undoubtedly decide the question as to the true ownership and enjoyment of the large estates now held by the gentleman who is the substantial defendant, I mean Mr. Aubrey, the member of Parliament for the borough of Yatton."

Aware of the watchful and formidable opponent who would in due time answer him, and also of being himself entitled to the general reply, to the last word, Mr. Subtle proceeded to state the nature of the plaintiff's case with the utmost brevity and clearness. Scarcely any sound was heard but that of the pens of the short-hand writers, and of the counsel taking their notes. Mr. Subtle, having handed up two or three copies of the pedigree which he held in his hand to the judge and jury, pointed out with distinctness and precision every link in the chain of evidence which he intended to lay before the jury; and having done this—having presented as few salient points of attack to his opponent as he possibly could—he sat down, professing his entire ignorance of what case could be set up in answer to that which he had opened. He had not been on his legs quite half-an-hour; and when he ceased, how he had disappointed every one present, except the judge and the bar! Instead of a speech befitting so great an occasion—impressive and eloquent—here had been a brief dry statement of a few uninteresting facts, dates, births, deaths, marriages, registers, entries, inscriptions, deeds, wills, without a single touch of feeling or ray of eloquence. The momentary feeling of disappointment in the audience, however, almost all of whom, it may easily be believed, were in the interest of the Aubreys, quickly yielded to one of satisfaction and relief; as they thought they might regard so meagre a speech as heralding in as meagre a case.

As soon as he sat down, Mr. Quicksilver rose and called the first witness. "We're safe!" said the Attorney-General to Mr. Sterling and Mr. Crystal, with his hand before his mouth, and with the very faintest whisper that could be audible to those whom he addressed; and the witness having been sworn, they all resumed their seats and their writing. The first and the subsequent witness established one or two preliminary and formal points, the Attorney-General scarcely rising to put a question to them. The third witness was examined by Mr. Subtle with apparent unconcern, but really with exquisite anxiety. From the earnestness and attention with which the words of the witness were watched and taken down by both the judge and the counsel, who knew much better than the audience where the strain of the case commenced, it must have appeared to the latter, that either Mr. Subtle under-estimated, or his opponents

over-estimated, the value of the evidence now in process of being extracted by Mr. Subtle, in short, easy, pointed questions, and with a smiling unconcerned countenance.

"Not so fast, sir," gruffly interposed Lord Widdrington, addressing the witness.

"Take time, Mr. Jones," said Mr. Subtle blandly, fearful of ruffling or discomposing an important witness. The Attorney-General rose to cross-examine; pressed him quietly but closely; varied the shape of his questions; now he soothed, then he startled by his sternness; but sat down, evidently having produced no impression. Thus it was with one or two succeeding witnesses; the Attorney-General, on each occasion, resuming his seat after his abortive efforts, with perfect composure. At length, however, by a very admirable and well-sustained fire of cross-questioning, he completely demolished a material witness; and the hopes of all interested in behalf of his clients rose high. Mr. Subtle, who had been all the while paring his nails, and from time to time smiling with a careless air (though you might as safely have touched a tigress suckling her cubs, as attempted at that moment to disturb him, so absorbed was he with intense anxiety), believing that he could establish the same facts by another and, as he believed, a better witness, did not re-examine; but calling that other, with an air of nonchalance, succeeded in extracting from him all that the other had failed in, and in baffling all the attempts of the Attorney-General to affect his credit, or disturb his equanimity.

At length, another witness being in the box,—*"My Lord I object to that question,"* said Mr. Attorney-General, as Mr. Subtle, amidst many indifferent and apparently irrelevant questions, quietly slipped in one of the greatest possible importance, had it been answered as he desired. 'Twas quite delightful to see the Attorney-General and his experienced and watchful juniors, all rise at one and the same instant; showing how vain were the tricks and ingenuity of their sly opponent. Mr. Attorney-General stated his objection, briefly and pointedly; Mr. Subtle answered him, followed by Quicksilver and Lynx; and then Mr. Attorney-General replied, with great force and clearness. This keen encounter of their wits over—"I shall allow the question to be put," said Lord Widdrington, after a pause. "But I have great doubts as to its propriety. I will therefore take a note of Mr. Attorney-General's objection."

Four or five similar conflicts arose during the course of the plaintiff's case; now concerning the competency of a witness—then as to the admissibility of a document, or the propriety of a particular question. On each of these occasions there were displayed on both sides consummate logical skill and acuteness, especially by the two leaders. Distinctions the most delicate and subtle were suggested with suddenness, and as promptly encountered; the most artful manoeuvres to secure dangerous admissions resorted to, and baffled; the more recondite principles of evidence brought to bear with admirable readiness on both sides. To deal with them required indeed the practised, penetrating, and powerful intellect of Lord Widdrington. Some points he disposed of promptly, to the satisfaction of both parties; on others he hesitated, and at length reserved them. The tombstone part of the case was got through easily; scarcely any attempt being made on the part of Mr. Aubrey's counsel to resist or interfere with it. But the great, the hottest part of the fight, occurred at that point of the case where Titmouse's descent from Stephen Dreddlington was sought to be established. This gentleman, who had been a very wild person, whose movements were very difficult to be traced or accounted for, had entered the navy, and ultimately died at sea, as had always been imagined, single and childless. It was proved, however, that so far from such being the case, he had married a person at Portsmouth, of inferior station; and that by her he had a daughter, only two years before his death, which happened at

sea, as has been stated. Both mother and daughter, after undergoing great privation, and no notice being taken of the mother by any of her late husband's family, removed to the house of a humble and distant relative in Cumberland, where the mother afterwards died, leaving her daughter, only fifteen years-old. When she grew up, she lived in some menial capacity in Cumberland, and ultimately married one Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse; who, after living for some years a cordwainer at Whitehaven, found his way to Grilston, in Yorkshire, in the neighbourhood of which town he had lived for some years, in very humble circumstances. There he had married; and about two years afterwards his wife died, leaving a son—our friend Tittlebat Titmouse. Both of them afterwards came to London; where in four or five years' time the father died, leaving the little Titmouse to flutter and hop about in the wide world as best he could. During the whole of this part of the case Mr. Gammon had evinced his deep anxiety, and at a particular point—perhaps the crisis—his agitation was excessive; yet it was almost entirely concealed by his remarkable self-control. The little documentary evidence of which Gammon, at his first interview with Titmouse, found him possessed, proved at the trial, as Gammon had foreseen, of great importance.

The evidence in support of this part of the case was subjected to a most determined and skilful opposition by the Attorney-General, but in vain. The case had been got up with the utmost care, under the excellent management of Lynx; and Mr. Subtle's consummate tact and ability brought it, at length, fully and distinctly out before the jury. "That, my Lord," said he, as he sat down, after re-examining the last witness, "is the case on the part of the plaintiff."

On this the judge and jury withdrew, for a short time, to obtain refreshment. During their absence the Attorney-General, Mr. Sterling, Mr. Crystal, and Mr. Mansfield might have been seen, with their heads all laid close together, engaged in anxious consultation—a group gazed at by the eager eyes of many a spectator whose beating heart wished their cause God-speed. The Attorney-General then withdrew for a few moments, also to seek refreshment; and returning at the same time with the judge, after a moment's pause rose, bowed to the judge, then to the jury, and opened the defendant's case. His manner was calm and impressive; his person was dignified; and his clear, distinct voice fell on the listening ear like the sound of silver. After a graceful allusion to the distinguished character of his friend and client, Mr. Aubrey (to whose eminent position in the House of Commons he bore his personal testimony), and to the magnitude of the interests now at stake, he proceeded—

"On every account, therefore, I feel sensible, gentlemen, to an unusual and most painful extent, of the very great responsibility now resting upon my learned friends and myself, lest any miscarriage of mine should prejudice in any degree the important interests committed to us, or impair the strength of the case which I am about to submit to you on the part of Mr. Aubrey: a case which, I assure you, unless some extraordinary mischance should befall us, will, I believe, annihilate that which with so much pains, so much tact, and so much ability, has just been laid before you by my learned friend, Mr. Subtle, and establish the defendant in the safe possession of that large property which is the subject of the present most extraordinary and unexpected litigation. But, gentlemen, before proceeding so far as that, it is fitting that I should call your attention to the nature of the case set up on the part of the plaintiff, and the sort of evidence by which it has been attempted to be supported; and I am very sanguine of being successful in showing you that the plaintiff's witnesses are not entitled to the credit to which they lay claim; and, consequently, that there is no case made out for the defendant to answer." He then entered into a rigorous analysis of the plaintiff's evidence, contrasting each conflicting portion with the other, with singular force and cogency; and

commenting with powerful severity upon the demeanour and character of many of the witnesses. On proceeding, at length, to open the case of the defendant—"And here, gentlemen," said he, "I am reminded of the observation with which my learned friend concluded—that he was entirely ignorant of the case which we meant to set up in answer to that which he had opened on the part of the plaintiff. Gentlemen, it would have been curious, indeed, had it been otherwise—had my friend's penetrating eye been able to inspect the contents of our strong-box, and so become acquainted with the evidence on which my client rests his title to the property now in dispute. He has, however, succeeded in entitling himself to information on that point; and he shall have it, and to his heart's content."

Here Mr. Subtle cast a glance of smiling incredulity towards the jury, and defiance towards the Attorney-General, he took his pen into his hand, however, and his juniors looked very anxious.

"Gentlemen," continued the Attorney-General, "I will now concede to my learned friend every inch of the case which he has been endeavouring to make out; that he has completely established his pedigree.—Mind, gentlemen, I concede this only for the purpose of the case which I am about to lay before you." He then mentioned the conveyance by Harry Dreddlington of all his interest—

"You forget that he died in his father's lifetime, Mr. Attorney-General," interposed Mr. Subtle, with a placid smile, and the air of a man who is suddenly relieved from a vast pressure of anxiety.

"Not a bit of it, gentlemen, not a bit of it—'tis a part of my case. My learned friend is quite right; Harry Dreddlington *did* die in his father's lifetime:—but—" Here Mr. Subtle gazed at the Attorney-General with unaffected curiosity; and, when the latter came to mention "the *Deed of Confirmation* by the father of Harry Dreddlington," an acute observer might have observed a slight change of colour in Mr. Subtle. Mr. Quicksilver went on writing—for he was entirely out of his depth, and therefore occupied himself with thinking over an article he was writing for some political review. Mr. Lynx looked at the Attorney-General as if he expected every instant to receive a musket-ball in his breast.

What, '*confirm*' a *nullity*, Mr. Attorney-General?" interrupted Mr. Subtle, laying down his pen with a smile of derision; but a moment or two afterwards, "Mr. Mortmain," said he, in a hasty whisper, "what do you think of this? Tell me—in four words—" Mortmain, his eye glued to the face of the Attorney-General the while, muttered hastily something about—*operating as a new grant—as a new conveyance*.

"Pshaw! I mean what's the *answer* to it?" muttered Mr. Subtle impatiently; but his countenance preserved its expression of smiling nonchalance. "You will oblige me, Mr. Mortmain," he by and by whispered, in a quiet but peremptory tone, "by giving your utmost attention to the question as to the effect of this deed—so that I may shape my objection to it properly when it is tendered in evidence. If it really have the legal effect attributed to it, and which I suspect is the case, we may as well shut up our briefs. I *thought* there must be some such cursed point or other in the background."

Gammon saw the real state of Mr. Subtle's mind, and his cheek turned pale, but he preserved a smile on his countenance, as he sat with his arms folded. Quirk eyed him with undisguised agitation, scarce daring to look up at Mr. Subtle. Titmouse, seeing a little dismay in his camp, turned very white and cold, and sat still, scarce daring to breathe; while Snap looked like a terrier going to have its teeth pulled out.

At length the Attorney-General, after stating that, in addition to the case which he had intimated, as resting mainly on the deed of confirmation, he

should proceed to prove the pedigree of Mr. Aubrey, sat down, having spoken about two hours and a half, expressing his conviction that when the defendant's evidence should have been closed, the jury, under his lordship's direction, would return a verdict for the defendant; and that, too, without leaving the jury-box, where, by their long and patient attention, they had so honourably acquitted themselves of the important duty imposed upon them by the constitution.

"James Parkinson!" exclaimed Mr. Sterling, quietly but distinctly, as the Attorney-General sat down. "You are the attorney for the defendant?" inquired Mr. Sterling, as soon as the witness had been sworn. "Do you produce a conveyance between Harry Dreddlington and Moses Aaron?" etc. (specifying it.) It was proved and put in, without much opposition. So also was another—the assignment from Moses Aaron to Geoffrey Dreddlington. "Do you also produce a deed between Harry Dreddlington the elder and Geoffrey Dreddlington?" and he mentioned the date and names of all the parties. Mr. Parkinson handed in the important document. "Stay, stay; where did you get that deed, Mr. Parkinson?" inquired Mr. Subtle sharply, extending his hand for the deed. "From my office at Grilston, where I keep many of Mr. Aubrey's title-deeds." "When did you bring it hither?" "About ten o'clock last night, for the purpose of this trial." "How long has it been at your office?" "Ever since I fetched it, a year or two ago, with other deeds, from the muniment-room of Yatton Hall." "How long have you been solicitor to Mr. Aubrey?" "For this ten years; and my father was solicitor to his father for twenty-five years." "Will you swear that this deed was in your office before the proceedings in this action were brought to your notice?" "I have not the slightest doubt in the world." "That does not satisfy me, sir. Will you *swear* that it was?" "I *will*, sir," replied Mr. Parkinson firmly. "It never attracted any more notice from me than any other of Mr. Aubrey's deeds, till my attention was drawn to it in consequence of these proceedings." "Has any one access to Mr. Aubrey's deeds at your office but yourself?" "None that I know of; I keep all the deeds of my clients that are at my office in their respective boxes, and allow no one access to them, except under my immediate notice, and in my presence." Then Mr. Subtle sat down.

"My Lord, we now propose to put in this deed," said the Attorney-General, unfolding it. "Allow me to look at it, Mr. Attorney," said Mr. Subtle. It was handed to him; and he, his juniors, and Mr. Mortmain, rising up, were engaged most anxiously in scrutinizing it for some minutes. Mortmain having looked at the stamp, sat down, and opening his bag, hastily drew out an old well-worn volume, which contained all the stamp acts that had ever been passed from the time of William the Third, when, I believe, the first of those blessings was conferred upon this country. First he looked at the deed—then at his book—then at the deed again; and at length might be seen, with earnest gestures, putting Mr. Subtle in possession of his opinion on the subject. "My Lord," said Mr. Subtle after a pause, "I object to this instrument being received in evidence, on account of the insufficiency of the stamp." This produced quite a sensation in court. Mr. Subtle then proceeded to mention the character of the stamp affixed to the deed, and read the act which was in force at the time that the deed bore date; and, after a few additional observations, sat down, and was followed by Mr. Quicksilver and Mr. Lynx. Then arose the Attorney-General, having in the mean time carefully looked at the Act of Parliament, and submitted to his Lordship that the stamp was sufficient; being followed by his juniors. Mr. Subtle replied at some length.

"I certainly entertain some difficulty on the point," said his Lordship, "and will mention the matter to my brother Grayley." Taking with him the deed, and Mr. Mortmain's Stamp Acts, his Lordship left the court, and was

absent a quarter of an hour—half an hour—three quarters of an hour ; and at length returned.

"I have consulted," said he, as soon as he had taken his seat, amidst the profoundest silence, "my brother Grayley, and we have very fully considered the point. My brother happens, fortunately, to have by him a manuscript note of a case in which he was counsel, about eighteen years ago, and in which the exact point arose which exists in the present case. He then read out of a thick manuscript book, which he had brought with him from Mr. Justice Grayley, the particulars of the case alluded to, and which was certainly almost precisely similar to those then before the court. In the case referred to, the stamp had been held sufficient ; and so, his Lordship and his brother Grayley were of opinion, was the stamp in the deed then before him. The cloud which had settled upon the countenances of the Attorney-General and his party, here fitted over to and settled upon those of his opponents. "Your Lordship will perhaps take a note of the objection," said Mr. Subtle, somewhat chagrined. Lord Widdrington nodded, and immediately made the requisite entry in his notes.

"Now, then, we propose to put in and read this deed," said the Attorney-General with a smile of suppressed triumph, holding out his hand towards Mr. Lynx, who was spelling over it very eagerly—"I presume my learned friend will require only the operative parts to be read"—here Lynx, with some excitement, called his leader's attention to something which had occurred to him in the deed : up got Quicksilver and Mortmain ; and presently—

"Not quite so fast, Mr. Attorney, if you please," said Mr. Subtle, with a little elation of manner—"I have another, and I apprehend a clearly fatal objection to the admissibility of this deed, till my learned friend shall have accounted for an *erasure*"—

"Erasure !" echoed the Attorney-General with much surprise—"Allow me to see the deed ;" and he took it with an incredulous smile, which, however, disappeared as he looked more and more closely at the instrument ; Mr. Sterling, Mr. Crystal, and Mr. Mansfield also looked extremely serious. "I've hit them *now*," said Mr. Subtle to those behind him, as he leaned back, and looked with no little triumph at his opponents—"by Jove!—was there ever anything so lucky in this world before ?"

From what apparently inadequate and trifling causes often flow great results ! The plain fact of the case was merely this. The attorney's clerk, in copying out the deed, which was one of considerable length, had written four or five words by mistake ; and fearing to exasperate his master, by rendering necessary a new deed and stamp, and occasioning trouble and delay, neatly scratched out the erroneous words, and over the erasure wrote the correct ones. As he was the party who was entrusted with seeing to and witnessing the execution of the instrument, he of course took no notice of the alteration, and—see the result ! The ownership of an estate of ten thousand a-year about to turn upon the effect of this erasure !

"Hand me up the deed," said the Judge ; and inspected it minutely for a minute or two. "Has any one a magnifying-glass in court ?" inquired the Attorney-General, with a look of increasing anxiety. No one happened to have one. "Is it necessary, Mr. Attorney ?" said Lord Widdrington, handing down the instrument to him with an ominous look.

"Well—you object, of course, Mr. Subtle—as I understand you—that this deed is void, on account of an erasure in a material part of it ?" inquired Lord Widdrington. "That is my objection, my Lord," said Mr. Subtle, sitting down.

"Now, Mr. Attorney," continued the Judge, turning to the Attorney-General, prepared to take a note of any observations he might offer. The spectators—the whole court—were aware that the great crisis of the case had arrived ; and

there was a sickening silence. The Attorney-General, with perfect calmness and self-possession, immediately addressed the court in answer to the objection. That there *was* an erasure, which, owing to the hurry with which the instrument had been looked at, had been overlooked, was indisputable; of course the Attorney-General's argument was, that it was an erasure in a part not material; but it was easy to see that he spoke with the air of a man who argues *contra spem*. What he said, however, was pertinent and forcible; the same might be said of Mr. Sterling and Mr. Crystal; but they were all plainly *gravelled*. Mr. Subtle replied with cruel cogency: Mr. Quicksilver seized the opportunity—not choosing to see that the Judge was with them—to make a most dangerous but showy speech; Mr. Subtle sitting beside him in the utmost distress, looking as if he could have withered him with a word. In consequence of some very unguarded admissions of Quicksilver, down came upon him Lord Widdrington; and Mr. Subtle—the only time during the whole cause in which he lost his self-command—uttered a half-stifled curse at the folly of Quicksilver, that could be heard by half the bar, perhaps even by the Judge, who greatly relished the exposure he was making of Quicksilver's indiscretion. At length he sat down, with a somewhat foolish air, Mr. Subtle turning his back full upon him before the whole court; but when Lynx rose, and in a business-like way, with only a word or two, put the point again fully before Lord Widdrington, the scowl gradually disappeared from the brow of Mr. Subtle.

"Well," said Lord Widdrington, when Mr. Lynx had done, "I own I feel no doubt at all upon the matter; but as it is certainly of the greatest possible importance, I will just see how it strikes my brother Grayley." With this he took the deed in his hand, and quitted the court. He touched Mr. Aubrey, in passing to his private room, holding the deed before him. After an absence of about ten minutes, Lord Widdrington returned.

"I entertain no doubt, nor does my brother Grayley," said Lord Widdrington, "that I ought not to receive this deed in evidence without accounting for an erasure occurring in a clearly essential part of it. Unless, therefore, you are prepared, Mr. Attorney, with any evidence as to this point, I shall not receive the deed."

There was a faint buzz all over the court—a buzz of excitement, anxiety, and disappointment. The Attorney-General consulted for a moment or two with his friends. "Undoubtedly, my Lord, we are not prepared with any evidence to explain an appearance which has taken us entirely by surprise. After this length of time, my Lord, of course—" "Certainly—it is a great misfortune for the parties—a great misfortune. Of course you tender the deed in evidence?" he continued, taking a note. "We do, my Lord, certainly."

You should have seen the faces of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, as they looked at Mr. Parkinson, with an agitated air, returning the rejected deed to the bag from which it had been lately taken with so confident and triumphant an air!—The remainder of the case, which had been opened by the Attorney-General on behalf of Mr. Aubrey, was then proceeded with; but in spite of all their assumed calmness, the disappointment and distress of his counsel were perceptible to all. They were now dejected—they felt that the cause was lost, unless some extraordinary good fortune should yet befall them. They were not long in establishing the descent of Mr. Aubrey from Geoffry Dreddlington. It was necessary to do so; for grievously as they had been disappointed in failing to establish the title paramount, founded upon the deed of confirmation of Mr. Aubrey, it was yet an important question for the jury, whether they believed the evidence adduced by the plaintiff to show title in himself.

"That, my Lord, is the defendant's case," said the Attorney-General, as his last witness left the box; and Mr. Subtle then rose to reply. He felt

how unpopular was his cause; that almost every countenance around him bore a hostile expression. Privately, he loathed his case when he saw the sort of person for whom he was struggling. All his sympathies—for he was a very proud, haughty man—were on behalf of Mr. Aubrey, whom by name and reputation he well knew; with whom he had often sat in the House of Commons. Now, conspicuous before him, sat his little monkey-client, Titmouse—a ridiculous object; and calculated, if there were any scope for the influence of prejudice, to ruin his own cause by the exhibition of himself before the jury. That was the vulgar idiot who was to turn the admirable Aubreys out of Yatton, and send them beggared into the world!—But Mr. Subtle was a high-minded English advocate; and if he had seen Miss Aubrey in all her loveliness, and knew her all depended upon his exertions, he could hardly have exerted himself more successfully than he did on the present occasion. And such, at length, was the effect which that exquisitely skilful advocate produced, in his address to the jury, that he began to bring about a change in the feelings of most around him; even the eye of scornful beauty began to direct fewer glances of indignation and disgust upon Titmouse, as Mr. Subtle's irresistible rhetoric drew upon their sympathies in his behalf. "My learned friend, the Attorney-General, gentlemen, dropped one or two expressions of a somewhat disparaging tendency, in alluding to my client, Mr. Titmouse; and shadowed forth a disadvantageous contrast between the obscure and ignorant plaintiff, and the gifted defendant. Good God, gentlemen! and is my humble client's misfortune to become his fault? If he be obscure and ignorant, unacquainted with the usages of society, deprived of the blessings of a superior education—if he have contracted vulgarity, *whose fault is it?*—Who has occasioned it? Who plunged him and his parents before him into an unjust poverty and obscurity, from which Providence is about this day to rescue him, and put him in possession of his own? Gentlemen, if topics like these must be introduced into this case, I ask you *who is accountable* for the present condition of my unfortunate client? Is he, or are those who have been, perhaps unconsciously, but still unjustly, so long revelling in the wealth that is his? Gentlemen, in the name of everything that is manly and generous, I challenge your sympathy, your commiseration, for my client."

Here Titmouse, who had been staring up open-mouthed for some time at his eloquent advocate, and could be kept quiet no longer by the most vehement efforts of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, rose up in an excited manner, exclaiming, "Bravo! bravo, bravo, sir! 'Pon my life, capital! It's quite true—bravo! bravo!" His astounded advocate paused at this unprecedented interruption. "Take the puppy out of court, sir, or I will not utter one word more," said he in a fierce whisper to Mr. Gammon.

"Who is that? Leave the court, sir! Your conduct is most indecent, sir! I have a great mind to commit you, sir!" said Lord Widdrington, directing an awful look down to the offender, who had turned of a ghastly whiteness. "Have mercy upon me, my lord! I'll never do it again," he groaned, clasping his hands, and verily believing that Lord Widdrington was going to take the estate away from him. Snap at length succeeded in getting him out of court; and after the excitement occasioned by this irregular interruption had subsided, Mr. Subtle resumed:—

"Gentlemen," said he, in a low tone, "I perceive that you are moved by this little incident; and it is characteristic of your superior feelings. Inferior persons, destitute of sensibility or refinement, might have smiled at eccentricities which occasion you only feelings of greater commiseration. I protest, gentlemen——" his voice trembled for a moment, but he soon resumed his self-possession; and, after a long and admirable address, sat down confident of the verdict.

"If we lose the verdict, sir," said he, bending down and whispering into the ear of Gammon, "we may thank that execrable little puppy for it. Gammon changed colour, but made no reply.

Lord Widdrington then commenced summing up the case to the jury, with his usual care and perspicacity. Nothing could be more beautiful than the ease with which he extricated the facts of the case from the meshes in which they had been alternately involved by Mr. Subtle and the Attorney-General. As soon as he had explained to them the general principles of law applicable to the case, he placed before them the facts proved by the plaintiff, and the answer of the defendant; every one in the court trembling for the result, if the jury took the same view which they felt compelled themselves to take. He suggested that they should retire to consider the case, taking with them the pedigrees which had been handed in to them; and added that, if they should require his assistance, he should remain in his private room for an hour or two. Both judge and jury then retired, it being about eight o'clock. Candles were lit in the court, which continued crowded to suffocation. Few doubted which way the verdict would go. Fatigued as must have been most of the spectators with a two days' confinement and excitement—ladies as well as gentlemen—scarce a person thought of quitting till the verdict had been pronounced. After an hour and a half's absence, a cry was heard—"Clear the way for the jury;" and one or two officers, with their wands, obeyed the directions. As the jury were re-entering their box, struggling with a little difficulty through the crowd, Lord Widdrington resumed his seat upon the bench.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have the goodness," said the associate, "to answer to your names.—*Sir Godolphin Fitzherbert*—" and, while their names were thus called over, all the counsel took their pens, and, turning over their briefs with an air of anxiety, prepared to indorse on them the verdict. As soon as all the jurymen had answered, a profound silence ensued.

"Gentlemen of the jury," inquired the associate, "are you agreed upon the verdict? Do you find your verdict for the plaintiff, or for the defendant?"

"FOR THE PLAINTIFF," replied the foreman; on which the officer, amidst a kind of blank dismayed silence, making at the same time some hieroglyphics upon the record, muttered—"Verdict for the Plaintiff.—*Damages, one shilling. Costs, forty shillings;*" while another functionary bawled out, amidst the increasing buzz in the court, "Have the goodness to wait, gentlemen of the jury. You will be paid immediately." Whereupon, to the disgust and indignation of the unlearned spectators, and the astonishment of some of the gentlemen of the jury themselves—many of them the very first men of the county—Snap jumped up on the form, pulled out his purse with an air of exultation, and proceeded to remunerate Sir Godolphin Fitzherbert and his companions with the sum of two guineas each. Proclamation was then made, and the court adjourned till the next morning.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE Attorney-General did his work very fairly, I thought—eh, Lynx?" said Mr. Subtle, as, arm-in-arm with Mr. Lynx, he quitted the castle gates, each of them on his way to their respective lodgings, to prepare for their next day's work. "Yes—he's a keen hand, to be sure; he's given us *all* work enough; and, I must say, it's been a capital set-to between you! I'm *very* glad you got the verdict!" "It wouldn't have done to be beaten on one's own dunghill,

as it were—eh? By the way, Lynx, that was a good hit of yours about the erasure—I ought, really, if it had occurred to me at the time, to have given you the credit of it; 'twas entirely yours, Lynx, I must say.” “Oh, no!” replied Lynx modestly. “It was a mere accident my lighting on it; the merit was, the use you made of it!” “To think of ten thousand a-year turning on that same trumpy erasure!” “But are you sure of our verdict on that ground, Mr. Subtle? Do you think Widdrington was right in rejecting that deed?” “Right? to be sure he was! But I own I got rather uneasy at the way the Attorney-General put it—that the estate had once been vested, and could not be subsequently de-vested by an alteration or blemish in the instrument evidencing the passing of the estate—eh? that was a good point, Lynx.” “Ay, but as Lord Widdrington put it—that could be only where the defect was proved to exist after a complete and valid deed had been once established.” “True—true; that’s the answer, Lynx; here, you see, the deed is disgraced in the first instance; no proof, in fact, that it ever *was* a deed—therefore, mere waste paper.” “To be sure, *possession* has gone along with the deed——” “Possession gone along with it?—What then!—That is to say, the man who has altered it, to benefit himself and his heirs, keeps it snugly in his own chest—and then that is of itself to be sufficient to——” “Yes—and again, you know, isn’t it the general rule that the party producing an instrument must account for the appearance of erasure or alteration to encounter the presumption of fraud?—it seems good sense enough!”

“It’s really been a very interesting cause,” said Mr. Subtle.

“D’ye think we shall keep the verdict, and get its fruits, Mr. Subtle?” “We shall keep the verdict, I’ve no doubt; there’s nothing in Widdrington’s notes that we need be afraid of—but of course they’ll put us to bring another ejectment, perhaps several.” “Yes—certainly—there *must* be a good deal of fighting before such a property as Yatton changes hands,” replied Lynx, with a complacent air; for he saw a few pleasant pickings in store for him. “By the way,” he continued, “our client’s a sweet specimen of humanity, isn’t he?” “Faugh! odious little reptile! And did you ever in all your life witness such a scene as when he interrupted me in the way he did?” “Ha, ha! Never! But, upon my honour, what an exquisite turn you gave the thing—it was worth more than called it forth—it was admirable.” “Pooh—Lynx!” said Mr. Subtle, with a gratified air; “knack—mere knack—nothing more. My voice trembled—eh?—at least so I intended.” “Upon my soul, Mr. Subtle, I almost thought you were for the moment overcome, and going to shed tears.” “Ah, ha, ha!—Delightful! I was convulsed with inward laughter! *Shed tears!!* Did the bar take it, Lynx?” inquired Mr. Subtle; for though he hated display, he loved *appreciation*, and by competent persons. “By the way, Lynx, the way in which you’ve got up the whole case does you vast credit—that opinion of yours on the evidence was—upon my word—the most masterly”—here he suddenly ceased and squeezed his companion’s arm, motioning him thereby to silence. They had come up with two gentlemen, walking slowly, and conversing in a low tone, but with much earnestness of manner. They were, in fact, Mr. Aubrey and Lord De la Zouch. Mr. Subtle and Mr. Lynx crossed over to the other side of the narrow street, and quickened their pace, so as soon to be out of sight and hearing of the persons they seemed desirous of avoiding. Mr. Subtle was, indeed, unable to bear the sight of the man whom his strenuous and splendid exertions during the last two days had tended to strip of his all—to thrust from the bright domain of wealth, prosperity, distinction, into—as it were—outer darkness—the outer darkness of poverty—of destitution.

“It’s a bore for Mr. Aubrey, isn’t it?” quoth the matter-of-fact Lynx. “It’s quite frightful!”—replied Mr. Subtle, in a tone of voice and with a manner

which showed how deeply he felt what he uttered. "And it's not only what he will lose, but what he will be liable to—the *mesne profits*—sixty thousand pounds." "Oh!—you think, then, that we can't go beyond the *statute of limitations*?—Eh?—is that so clear?" Mr. Subtle looked sharply at Lynx, with an expression it would be difficult to describe. "Well"—continued the impenetrable Lynx—"at all events I'll look into it." He felt about as much *sentiment* in the matter, as a pig eating acorns would feel interest in the antiquity of the oak from which they fell, and under whose venerable shade he was munching and stuffing himself.

As soon as Titmouse had been ejected from the court, in the summary way which the reader will remember, merely on account of his having, with slight indecorum, yielded to the mighty impulse of his agitated feelings, he began to cry bitterly, wringing his hands, and asking every one about him if they thought he could get in again, because it was his case that was going on. His eyes were red and swollen with weeping; and his little breast throbbed violently as he walked to and fro from one door of the court to the other. "Oh, gents, will you get me in again?" said he, in passionate tones, approaching two gentlemen, who, with a very anxious and oppressed air, were standing together at the outside of one of the doors—in fact, Lord De la Zouch and Mr. Aubrey; and they quickly recognized in Titmouse the gentleman whose claims were being at that instant mooted within the court. "Will you get me in? You seem such *respectable* gents—'Pon my soul, I'm going mad! It's my case that's going on! I'm Mr. Titmouse——" "We have no power, sir, to get you in," replied Lord De la Zouch haughtily; so coldly and sternly as to cause Titmouse involuntarily to shrink from him. "The court is crowded to the very door, sir—and we really have no more right to be present in court, or get others into court, than you have," said Mr. Aubrey, with mildness and dignity.

"Thank you, sir! Thank you!" quoth Titmouse, moving with an apprehensive air away from Lord De la Zouch, towards Mr. Aubrey. "Know quite well who you are, sir! 'Pon my solemn soul, sir, sorry to do all this; but law's law, and right's right, all the world over." "I *desire* you to leave us, sir," said Lord De la Zouch with irrepressible sternness; "you are very intrusive. How can we catch a syllable of what is going on while you are chattering in this way?" Titmouse saw that Mr. Aubrey looked towards him with a very different expression from that exhibited by his forbidding companion, and would perhaps have stood his ground, but for a glimpse he caught of a huge, powdered, broad-shouldered footman, in a splendid livery, one of Lord De la Zouch's servants, who, with a great thick cane in his hand, was standing at a little distance behind, in attendance on the carriage, which was standing in the castle-yard. This man's face looked so ready for mischief, that Titmouse slowly walked off. There were a good many standers-by, who seemed all to look with dislike and distrust at Titmouse. He made many ineffectual attempts to persuade the door-keeper, who had assisted in his extrusion, to re-admit him; but the incorruptible janitor was proof against a sixpence—even against a shilling; and at length Titmouse gave himself up to despair, and thought himself the most miserable man in the whole world—as very probably, indeed, he was: for consider what a horrid interval of suspense he had to endure, from the closing of Mr. Subtle's speech till the delivery of the verdict. But at length, through this portentous and apparently impenetrable cloud burst the rich sunlight of success.

"Mr. Titmouse!—Mr. Titmouse!—Mr. Tit——"

"Here! Here I am! Here!"—exclaimed the little fellow, jumping off the window-seat on which he had been sitting for the last hour in the dark, half stupefied with grief and exhaustion. The voice that called him was a blessed

voice—a familiar voice—the voice of Mr. Gammon; who, as soon as the jury began to come back, on some pretence or other had quitted his seat between Quirk and Snap, in order, if the verdict should be for the plaintiff, to be the very first to communicate it to him. In a moment or two Mr. Gammon had grasped both Mr. Titmouse's hands. "My dear, dear Mr. Titmouse, I congratulate you! You are victorious! God grant you long life to enjoy your good fortune! God bless you, Titmouse!" He wrung Titmouse's hands—and his voice trembled with the intensity of his emotions. Mr. Titmouse had gone very white, and for a while spoke not, but stood staring at Mr. Gammon, as if he was hardly aware of the import of his communication. "No—but—is it so? Honour bright?" at length he stammered. "It is indeed! My long labours are at length crowned with success!—Hurrah, hurrah, Mr. Titmouse!" "I've really *won*? It a'n't a joke or a dream?" inquired Titmouse with quickly increasing excitement, and a joyous expression bursting over his features, which became suddenly flushed. "A joke!—the best you'll ever have. A dream!—that will last your life. Thank God, Mr. Titmouse, the battle's ours; we've defeated all their villainy!"

"*Tol de rol! Tol de rol! Tol de lol, lol, lol rido!*—Ah," he added in a loud truculent tone, as Lord De la Zouch and Mr. Aubrey slowly passed him,— "done for you now—'pon my life!—turned the tables!—*that* for you!" said he, snapping his fingers; but I need hardly say that he did so with perfect impunity as far as those two gentlemen were concerned, who were so absorbed with the grievous event which had just happened, as scarcely to be aware of their being addressed at all.

"Aubrey, it's against you—all is lost; the verdict is for the plaintiff!" said Lord De la Zouch in a hurried agitated whisper, as he grasped the hand of Mr. Aubrey, whom he had quitted for an instant to hear the verdict pronounced. Mr. Aubrey for some moments spoke not. "God's will be done!" at length said he in a low tone, or rather in a faint murmur. More than a dozen gentlemen, who came crowding out, grasped his hand with great energy and vehemence. "God bless you, Aubrey! God bless you!"—said several voices, their speakers wringing his hand with great vehemence as they spoke. "Let us go,"—said Lord De la Zouch, putting Mr. Aubrey's arm in his own, and leading him away from a scene of distressing excitement, too powerful for his exhausted feelings.

"I am nothing of a fatalist," said Mr. Aubrey, after a pause of some minutes, during which they had quitted the castle-gates, and his feelings had recovered from the shock which they had just before suffered; "I am nothing of a fatalist, but I ought not to feel the least surprise at this issue, for I have long had a settled conviction that such *would* be the issue. For some time before I had the least intimation of the commencement of these proceedings, I was oppressed by a sense of impending calamity—" "Well, that may be so; but it does not follow that the mischief is finally *done*." "I am certain of it!—But, dear Lord De la Zouch, how much I owe to your kindness and sympathy!" said Mr. Aubrey with a slight tremor in his voice. "We are at this moment, Aubrey, firmer friends than we ever were before. So help me Heaven! I would not lose your friendship for the world; I feel it a greater honour than I am worthy of—I do, indeed," said Lord De la Zouch with great emotion. "There is a great gulf between us though, Lord De la Zouch, as far as worldly circumstances are concerned—you are a peer of the realm, I a beggar." "Forgive me, Aubrey, but it is idle to talk in that way; I am hurt beyond measure at your supposing it possible that under any circumstances—" "Believe me, I feel the full value of your friendship—more valuable at this moment than ever." "That a serious calamity has fallen upon you is certain;—which of us, indeed, is safe from such a calamity? But who would bear it with the

calm fortitude which *you* have already evinced, my dear Aubrey?" "You speak very kindly, Lord De la Zouch; I trust I shall play the man, now that the time for playing a man's part has come," said Mr. Aubrey with an air of mingled melancholy and resolution. "I feel an inexpressible consolation in the reflection, that I cannot charge myself with anything unconscientious; and, as for the future, I put my trust in God. I feel as if I could submit to the will of Heaven with cheerfulness——" "Don't speak so despondingly, Aubrey——" "Despondingly?" echoed Mr. Aubrey with momentary animation—"Despondingly? My dear friend, I feel as if I were indeed entering a scene black as midnight—but what is it to the *valley of the shadow of death*, dear Lord De la Zouch, which is before all of us, and at but a little distance! I assure you I feel no vain-glorious confidence; yet I seem to be leaning on the arm of an unseen and all-powerful supporter!" "You are a hero, my dear Aubrey!" exclaimed Lord De la Zouch with sudden fervour. "And that support will embrace those dearer to me than life—dearer—far—far——"

He ceased: his feelings quite overcame him, and they walked on for some time in silence. Soon afterwards they parted—for Lord De la Zouch perceived that his unfortunate companion wished to be alone. He wrung Mr. Aubrey's hands in silence; and having turned in the direction of his hotel, Mr. Aubrey made for his lodgings. The streets were occupied by passengers, some returning from the castle after the great trial of the day; others standing here and there, in little knots, conversing as he passed them; and he felt conscious that the subject of their thoughts and conversation, was himself and his fallen fortunes. Several deep-drawn sighs escaped him, as he walked on, the herald of such dismal tidings, to those whom he loved; and he felt but for that which supported him from within, as it were, a fallen angel, so far as concerned this world's honours and greatness. As he neared the retired row of houses where his lodgings were situated, he imagined that he saw some one near the door of his lodgings, as if on the look out for his approach; and who, as he drew nearer, at length entered his lodgings. This was a person whom Mr. Aubrey did not at all suspect—it was his worthy friend Dr. Tatham; who, unable to quit Yatton in time to hear the trial, had early that morning mounted his horse, and, after a long and hard ride, reached York soon after Mr. Aubrey had set off for the Castle. Though many of the county people then in York were aware that Mrs. and Miss Aubrey were also there, a delicate consideration for their exquisitely distressing situation restrained them from intruding upon their privacy, which had been evidently sought for by the species of lodgings which Mr. Aubrey had engaged. On the second day, the excellent Dr. Tatham had been their welcome and instructive guest, scarce ever leaving them; Mr. Aubrey's groom bringing word, from time to time, from his master how the trial went on. Late in the evening, urged by Kate, the Doctor had gone off to the castle, to wait till he could bring intelligence of the final result of the trial. He had not been observed by Mr. Aubrey amidst the number of people who were about; and had at length fulfilled his mission, and been beforehand with Mr. Aubrey in communicating the unfortunate issue of the struggle. The instant that Mr. Aubrey had set his foot within the door, he was locked in the impassioned embrace of his wife and sister. None of them spoke for some moments.

"Dearest Charles!—we've heard it all—we know it all!" at length they exclaimed in a breath. "Thank God, it is over at last—and we know the worst!—Are you well, dearest Charles?" inquired Mrs. Aubrey with fond anxiety. "Thank God, my Agnes, I am well!" said Mr. Aubrey, much excited—"and thank God that the dreadful suspense is at an end; and for the fortitude, my sweet loves, with which you bear the result. And how are *you*, my excellent friend?" continued he, addressing Dr. Tatham, and grasping

his hands; "my venerable and pious friend—how it refreshes my heart to see you! as one of the chosen ministers of that God whose creatures we are, and whose dispensations we receive with reverent submission!" "God Almighty bless you all, my dear friends!" replied Dr. Tatham, powerfully affected. "Believe that all this is from Him! He has wise ends in view, though we see not nor comprehend them! *Faint not when ye are rebuked of Him! If ye faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small!* But I rejoice to see your resignation!"—Aubrey, his wife, and sister, were for a while overcome with their emotions.

"I assure you all," said Aubrey, "I feel as if a very mountain had been lifted off my heart! How blessed am I in such a wife and sister!" A heavenly smile irradiated his pale features—and he clasped his wife and then his sister in his arms. They wept as they tenderly returned his embrace. "Heaven," said he, "that gave us all, has taken all: why should we murmur? He will enable us, if we pray for His assistance, to bear with equanimity our present adversity, as well as our past prosperity! Come, Agnes! Kate! play the woman!"

Dr. Tatham sat silent by; but the tears ran down his cheeks. At length Mr. Aubrey gave them a general account of what had occurred at the trial—and which, I need hardly say, was listened to in breathless silence.

"Who is that letter from, love, lying on the table?" inquired Mr. Aubrey, during a pause in the conversation. "It's only from Johnson—dearest! to say the children are quite well," replied Mrs. Aubrey. The ruined parents, as if by a common impulse, looked unutterable things at each other. Then the mother turned deadly pale; and her husband tenderly kissed her cold cheek; while Kate could scarcely restrain her feelings. The excitement of each was beginning to give way before sheer bodily and mental exhaustion; and Dr. Tatham, observing it, rose to take his departure. It was arranged that the carriage should be at the door by eight o'clock in the morning, to convey them back to Yatton—and that Dr. Tatham should breakfast with, and then accompany them on horseback. He then took his departure for the night, with a very full heart; and those whom he left soon afterwards retired for the night; and having first invoked the mercy and pity of Heaven, sank into slumber and brief forgetfulness of the perilous position in which they had been placed by the event of the day.

Somewhat different was the mode in which the night was spent by the victorious party. Gammon, as has been seen, was the first to congratulate Titmouse on his splendid success. The next was old Quirk—who, with a sort of conviction that he should find Gammon beforehand with him—bustled out of court, leaving Snap to pay the jury, settle the court-fees, collect the papers, and so forth. Both Quirk and Snap (as soon as he was at liberty) exhibited a courtesy towards Titmouse which had a strong dash of reverence in it, such as was due to the possessor of ten thousand a-year; but Gammon exhibited the tranquil matter-of-fact confidence of a man who had determined to be, and indeed knew that he *was*, the entire master of Titmouse.

"I—wish you'd call a coach, or something of that sort, gents.—I'm devilish tired—I am, 'pon my soul!" said Mr. Titmouse yawning, as he stood on the steps between Quirk and Gammon, waiting for Snap's arrival. He was, in fact, almost mad—bursting with excitement; and could not stand still for a moment. Now he whistled loudly and boldly; then he hummed a bar or two of some low comic song; and ever and anon drew on and off his damp gloves with an air of petulant impetuosity. Now he ran his hand through his hair with careless grace; and then, with arms folded on his breast for a moment, looked eagerly, but with a would-be languid air, at two or three elegant equipages, which one by one, with their depressed and disappointed

inmates, rolled off. At length Lord Widdrington, amidst a sharp impetuous cry of "Make way for the judge there—make way for his lordship!" appeared in his robes, with a wearied air; and passing close by Titmouse, was honoured by him with a very fine bow indeed—not being, however, in the least aware of the fact—as he passed on to his carriage. The steps were drawn up; the door was closed; and amidst a sharp blast of trumpets, the carriage drove slowly off, preceded and followed by the usual attendants. As there was no coach to be had, Mr. Titmouse was forced to walk home, arm-in-arm with Mr. Quirk and Mr. Gammon, and followed, at a little distance, by a knot of persons, acquainted with his name and person, and feeling towards him a strange mixture of emotions—dislike, wonder, contempt, admiration. Goodness gracious! that strange little gentleman was now worth, it was said, ten thousand a-year; and was squire of Yatton!! Old Quirk shook Titmouse's hand with irrepressible enthusiasm, at least a dozen times on their way to the inn; while Gammon now and then squeezed his arm, and spoke, in an earnest tone, of the difficulties yet to be overcome. On reaching the inn, the landlady, who was standing at the door, and had evidently been on the look-out for her suddenly distinguished guest, received him with several most profound curtsies, and most eager and respectful inquiries about his health, as he had had no luncheon—and asking what he would be pleased to have for his supper. She added, moreover, that fearing his former bedroom might not have been to his mind, she had changed it, and he would that night sleep in the very best she had.

"We must make a night on't, eh?" quoth Mr. Quirk, with an excited air. His partners assented to it, as did Mr. Titmouse; and cold beef, sausages, fowl, ham, beef-steaks, and mutton-chops, were ordered to be in readiness in half-an-hour's time. Soon afterwards Mr. Titmouse followed the chambermaid to his new bedroom.

"This is the room we always give to quality folk—when we get them," said she, as she set his candle on the drawers, and looked with a little triumph round the room.

"Ah—yes!—'pon my soul—quite right—always do your best for quality!—Lovely gal—eh?" Here he chuckled her under the chin, and seemed disposed to imprint a kiss upon her cheek: but, with a "Lord, sir—that's not the way quality folks behave!" she modestly withdrew. Titmouse, left alone, first threw himself on the bed; then started off, and walked about; then sat down; then danced about; then took off his coat; then threw himself on the bed again; hummed, whistled, jumped up again—in a sort of wild ecstasy, or delirium. In short, it is plain that he was not master of himself. In fact, his little mind was as agitated by the day's event, as a small green puddle by the roadside for a while would be on a stone being suddenly flung into it by a child. While Messrs. Quirk and Snap were, after their sort, as excited as even Mr. Titmouse was, Gammon, retiring to his bedroom, and ordering thither pens, ink, and paper, sat down and wrote the following letter:—

"York, 5th April, 18—.

"MY DEAR SIR,—The very first leisure moment I have, I devote to informing you, as one of the most intimate friends of our highly respected client, Mr. Titmouse, of the brilliant event which has just occurred. After a most severe and protracted struggle of two days (the Attorney-General having come down special on the other side), the jury, many of them the chief gentlemen of the county, have within this last hour returned a verdict in favour of our common friend, Mr. Titmouse—thereby declaring him entitled to the whole of the estates at Yatton (ten thousand a-year rent-roll, at least), and, by consequence, to an immense accumulation of bygone rents, which must be made up to him

by his predecessor, who, with all his powerful party, and in spite of the unscrupulous means resorted to to defeat the ends of justice is dismayed beyond expression at the result of this grand struggle—unprecedented in the annals of modern litigation. The result has given lively satisfaction in these parts—it is plain that our friend Mr. Titmouse will very soon become a great lion in society.

“To you, my dear-sir, as an early and valued friend of our interesting client, I sit down to communicate the earliest intelligence of this most important event; and I trust that you will, with our respectful compliments, communicate this happy event to your amiable family—who, I am persuaded, must ever feel a very warm interest in our client's welfare. He is now, naturally enough, much excited with his extraordinary good fortune, to which we are only too proud and happy to have contributed by our humble, but strenuous and long-continued exertions. He begs me to express his most cordial feelings towards you, and to say that, on his return to town, Satin Lodge will be one of the very first places at which he will call. In the mean time, I beg you will believe me, my dear sir, with the best compliments of myself and partners, yours most sincerely,

“OILY GAMMON.

“THOMAS TAG-RAG, ESQ.,
etc., etc., etc.”

“That, I think, will about do”—quoth Gammon to himself, with a thoughtful air, as, having made an exact copy of the above letter, he sealed it up and directed it. He then came downstairs to supper, having first sent the letter off to the post-office. What a merry meal was that same supper! Mr. Titmouse, Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap, ate almost to bursting: Gammon was more abstinent—but overpowered by the importunities of his companions, took a far greater quantity than usual of the bouncing bottled porter, the hard port, and fiery sherry, which his companions drank as if they had been but water. Then came in the spirits—with hot water and cold; and to these all present did ample justice; in fact it was very hard for any one to resist the other's entreaties. Mr. Gammon in due time felt himself *going*—but seemed as if, on such an occasion, he had no help for it. Every one of the partners, at different stages of the evening, made a speech to Titmouse, and proposed his health; who, of course, replied to each, and drank the health of each. Presently old Quirk sang a comic song, in a very dismal key; and then he and Snap joined in one called “*Handcuff v. Halter*,” at which Gammon laughed heartily, and listened with that degree of pleased attention, which showed that he had resolved, for once at least, to abandon himself to the enjoyment of the passing hour. Then Titmouse began to speak of what he should do, as soon as he had “touched the shiners”—his companions entering into all his little schemes with a sort of affectionate enthusiasm. At length old Mr. Quirk, after by turns laughing, crying, singing, and talking, leaned back in his chair, with his half-emptied tumbler of brandy and water in his hand, and fell fast asleep. Gammon also, in spite of all he could do, began—the deuce take it!—to feel and exhibit the effects of a hasty and hearty meal, and his very unusual potations, especially after such long abstinence and intense anxiety as he had experienced during the previous two days. He had intended to have seen them all under the table; but he began gradually to feel a want of control over himself, his thoughts, and feelings, which a little disquieted him, as he now and then caught glimpses of the extent to which it was proceeding. “*In vino veritas*,” properly translated, means—that when a man is fairly under the influence of liquor, you see a strong manifestation of his real character. Now Mr. Gammon was a cold, cautious, long-headed schemer;

and as the fumes of liquor mounted up into his head, they only increased the action and intensity of those qualities for which, when sober, he was so pre-eminently distinguished, only that there was a half-conscious want of coherency and subordination. The impulse and the habit were present; but there seemed a strange disturbing force: in short—what is the use of disguising matters?—Mr. Gammon was getting very drunk; and he felt very sorry for it—but it was too late. In due time the dismal effort *not to appear* drunk, ceased—a great relief! Silent and more silent he became; more and more observant of the motions of Snap and Titmouse; more and more complicated and profound in his schemes and purposes; and at length he felt as if, by some incomprehensible means, he were taking *himself* in— inveigling himself: at which point, after a vain attempt to understand his exact position with reference to himself, he slowly, but *rather* unsteadily, rose from his chair; looked with an unsettled eye at Titmouse for nearly a minute; a queer smile now and then flitted across his features; and he presently rang the bell. Boots having obeyed the summons, Gammon with a very turbid brain followed him to the door, with a most desperate effort to walk thither steadily—but in vain. Having reached his room, he sat down with a sort of suspicion that he had said or done something to commit himself. Vain was the attempt to wind up his watch; and at length he gave it up, with a faint curse. With only one stocking off, conceiving himself to be undressed, after four or five times trying to blow out his candle in vain, he succeeded and got into bed; his head, however, occupying the place in the bed assigned to his feet. He lay asleep for about half-an-hour—and then experienced certain insupportable sensations. He was indeed very miserable; and lost all thoughts of what would become of Titmouse—of Quirk and Snap—in his own indisposition.

"I say, Snap," quoth Titmouse with a grin, and putting his finger to his nose, as soon as Gammon had quitted the room in the manner above described—"Mr. Quirk a'n't much company for us just now, eh? Shall we go out and have some fun?"

"Walk will do us good—yes. Go where you like, Titmouse," replied Snap, who, though young, was a thoroughly seasoned vessel, and could hold a great deal of drink without seeming, or *really being* much the worse for it. As for Titmouse, happily for him! (seeing that he was so soon to have the command of unlimited means, unless indeed the envious fates should in the mean time interpose to dash the brimful cup from his eager lips), he was becoming more and more accustomed to the effects of drink; which had, up to the moment I am speaking of, no other effect than to elevate his spirits up to the pitch of indefinite daring and enterprise. "'Pon my life, Snap, couldn't we stand another tumbler—eh? Warm us for the night air?" "What shall it be?" quoth Snap, ringing the bell—"whisky?"

"Devil knows, and devil cares!" replied Mr. Titmouse recklessly; and presently there stood before the friends two steaming tumblers of what they had ordered. Immediately after disposing of them, the two gentlemen, quite *up to the mark*, as they expressed it—each with a cigar in his mouth—sallied forth in quest of adventures. Titmouse felt that he had now become a gentleman; and his taste and feelings prompted him to pursue, as early as possible, a gentlemanly line of conduct—particularly in his amusements. It was now past twelve; and the narrow old-fashioned streets of York, silent and deserted, formed a strong contrast to the streets of London at the same hour, and seemed scarcely to admit of much sport. But sport our friends were determined to have; and the night air aiding the effect of their miscellaneous potations, they soon became somewhat excited and violent. Yet it seemed difficult to get up a *row*—for no one was visible in any direction. Snap, however, by way of making a beginning, suddenly shouted "Fire!" at the top

of his voice, and Titmouse joined him; when having heard half-a-dozen windows hastily thrown up by the dismayed inhabitants whom the alarming sounds had aroused from sleep, they scampered off at their top speed. In another part of the town, they yelled, and whistled, and crowed like cocks, and mewed like cats—the last two being accomplishments in which Titmouse was very eminent—and again took to their heels. Then they contrived to twist a few knockers off doors, pull bells, and break a few windows; and while exercising their skill in this last branch of the night's amusement, Titmouse, in the very act of aiming a stone which took effect in the middle of a bed-room window, was surprised by an old watchman waddling round the corner. He was a feeble asthmatic old man; so Snap knocked him down at once, and Titmouse blew out the candle in his lantern, which he then jumped upon and smashed to pieces, and knocked its prostrate owner's hat over his eyes. Snap, on some strange unaccountable impulse, wrested the rattle out of the poor creature's hand, and sprang it loudly. This brought several other old watchmen from different quarters; and aged numbers prevailing against youthful spirit—the two gentlemen, after a considerable scuffle, were overpowered and conveyed to the cage. Snap having muttered something about demanding to look at the *warrant*, and then about a malicious arrest and false imprisonment, sank on a form, and then down upon the floor, and fell fast asleep. Titmouse for a while showed a very resolute front, and swore a great many oaths, that he would fight the Boots at the inn for five shillings, if he dared show himself; but all of a sudden, his spirit collapsed, as it were, and he sank on the floor, and was grievously indisposed for some hours. About nine o'clock, the contents of the cage—viz., Snap, Titmouse, two farmers' boys who had been caught stealing cakes, an old beggar, and a young pickpocket—were conveyed before the Lord Mayor, to answer for their several misdeeds. Snap was woefully crest-fallen. He had sent for the landlord of the inn where they had put up, to come, on their behalf, to the Mansion House; but he told Quirk of the message he had received. Mr. Quirk, finding that Gammon could not leave his room through severe indisposition—the very first time that Mr. Quirk had ever seen or heard of his being so overtaken—set off, in a very mortified and angry mood, in quest of his hopeful client and junior partner. They were in a truly dismal pickle. Titmouse, pale as death, his clothes disordered, and one of his shirt-collars torn off; Snap sat beside him with a sheepish air, looking as if he could hardly keep his eyes open. At him Mr. Quirk looked with a keen indignation, but spoke not to him nor for him: for Titmouse, however, he expressed great commiseration, and entreated his lordship to overlook the little misconduct of which he (Titmouse), in a moment of extreme excitement, had been guilty, on condition of his making amends for the injury, both to person and property, of which he had been guilty. By this time his lordship had become aware of the names and circumstances of the two delinquents; and, after lecturing them very severely, he fined them five shillings a-piece for being drunk, and permitted them to be discharged, on their promising never to offend in the like way again, and paying three pounds by way of compensation to the watchman, and one or two persons whose knockers they were proved to have wrenched off, and windows to have broken. His lordship had delayed the case of Messrs. Snap and Titmouse to the last; chiefly because, as soon as he had found out who Mr. Titmouse was, it occurred to him that he would make a sort of little star at the great ball to be given by the Lady Mayoress that evening. As soon, therefore, as the charge had been disposed of, his lordship desired Mr. Titmouse to follow him, for a moment, to his private room. There, having shut the door, he gently chided Mr. Titmouse for the indiscretion of which he had been guilty, and of which it was not to have been expected that a gentleman of his

consequence in the county would be guilty. His lordship begged him to consider the station which he was now called to occupy ; and, in alluding to the signal event of the preceding day, warmly congratulated him upon it : and, by the way, his lordship trusted that Mr. Titmouse would, in the evening, favour the Lady Mayoress and himself with his company at the ball, where they would be very proud of the opportunity of introducing him to some of the gentry of the county, amongst whom his future lot in life was likely to be cast. Mr. Titmouse listened to all this as if he were in a dream. His brain (the little of it that he had) was yet in a most unsettled state ; as also was his stomach. When he heard the words "Lady Mayoress," "ball," "mansion-house," "gentry of the county," and so forth, a dim vision of splendour flashed before his eyes ; and, with a desperate effort, he assured the Lord Mayor that he should be very uncommon proud to accept the invitation, if he were well enough—but just then he was uncommon ill.

His lordship pressed him to take a glass of water, to revive him and settle his stomach ; but Mr. Titmouse declined it, and soon afterwards quitted the room ; and leaning on the arm of Mr. Quirk, set off homeward—Snap walking beside him in silence, with a very quaint disconcerted air—not being taken the least notice of by Mr. Quirk. Mr. Quirk, finding that Mr. Gammon was far too much indisposed to think of quitting York, at all events till a late hour in the evening, and, indeed, that Titmouse was similarly situated—with a very bad grace consented to them stopping behind ; and himself, with Snap—the former inside, the latter outside—having settled with most of the witnesses, leaving the remainder, with their own expenses at the inn, to be settled by Mr. Gammon—set off for town by the two o'clock coach.

It was, indeed, high time for them to return ; for the oppressed inmates of Newgate were getting wild on account of the protracted absence of their kind and confidential advisers. When they left, both Gammon and Titmouse were in bed. The former, however, began to revive, shortly after the coach which conveyed away his respected co-partners, and the guard's horn had ceased to be heard ; and about an hour afterwards he descended from his room, a great deal the better for the duties of the toilette, and a bottle of soda-water with a little brandy in it. A cup of strong tea, and a slice or two of dry toast, set him entirely to rights,—and then Gammon—the calm, serene, astute Gammon—was "himself again." Had he said anything indiscreet, or in any way committed himself, overnight?—thought he, as he sat alone, with folded arms, trying to recollect what had taken place. He hoped not—but had no means of ascertaining. Then he entered upon a long and anxious consideration of the position of affairs, since the great event of the preceding evening. The only definite object which he had had in view, personally, in entering into the affair, was the obtaining that ascendancy over Titmouse, in the event of his becoming possessed of the magnificent fortune they were in quest of for him, which might enable him, in one way or another, to elevate his own position in society, and secure for himself permanent and solid advantages. In the progress of the affair, however, new views presented themselves to his mind.

Towards the close of the afternoon Titmouse recovered sufficiently to make his appearance downstairs. Soon afterwards, Gammon proposed a walk, as the day was fine, and the brisk fresh country air would be efficacious in restoring Titmouse to his wonted health and spirits. His suggestion was adopted ; and soon afterwards might have been seen, Gammon, supporting on his arm his languid and interesting client Mr. Titmouse, making their way to the river ; along whose quiet and pleasing banks they walked for nearly a couple of hours in close conversation ; during which, Gammon, by repeated and various efforts, succeeded in producing an impression on Titmouse's mind, that the good fortune which seemed now within his reach, had been

secured for him by the enterprise, skill, and caution of one, Mr. Gammon, only; who would, moreover, continue to devote himself to Mr. Titmouse's interests and protect him from the designs of those who would endeavour to take advantage of him. Mr. Gammon also dropped one or two vague hints that his—Titmouse's—continuance in the enjoyment of the Yatton property, would always depend upon the will and power of him, the aforesaid Gammon; in whose hands were most unsuspected, but potent weapons. And indeed it is not at all impossible that such may prove to be really the case.

Gammon heard with uneasiness of Titmouse's intention to go to the Lady Mayoress's ball that evening; and, for many reasons, resolved that he should not. In vain, however, did Gammon try to persuade him that he was asked only to be turned into ridicule, for that almost everybody there would be in the interest of the Aubreys, and bitterly opposed to him, Mr. Titmouse; in spite of these and all other representations, Titmouse expressed his determination to go to the ball: on which Gammon, with a good-natured smile, exclaimed, "Well, well!"—and withdrew his opposition. Shortly after their return from their walk, they sat down to dinner; and Gammon, with a cheerful air, ordered a bottle of champagne, of which he drank about a glass and a half, and Titmouse the remainder. That put him into a humour to take more wine, without much pressing; and he swallowed, in rapid succession, a glass of ale, and seven or eight glasses of port and sherry. By this time he had forgotten all about the ball, and clamoured for brandy and water. Gammon, however, saw that his end was answered. Poor Titmouse was becoming rapidly more and more helpless; and within half-an-hour's time was assisted to his bedroom in a very sad state.

Alas! how disappointed were the Mayor and Mayoress, that their queer little lion did not make his appearance in the gay and brilliant scene! How many had they told that he was coming! The three daughters were almost bursting with vexation and astonishment. They had been disposed to entertain a warmer feeling than that of mere curiosity towards the new owner of an estate worth ten thousand a-year—had drawn lots which of them was first to dance with him; and had told all their friends on which of them the lot had fallen. Then, again, many of the county people inquired, from time to time, of the chagrined little Mayor and Mayoress, when "Mr. Ticklemouse," "Mr. Tipmouse," "Mr. Tipplebattle," or "whatever his name might be," was coming; full of real curiosity, much tintured, however, with disgust and contempt, to see the stranger, who had suddenly acquired so commanding a station in the county, so strong a claim to their sympathy and respect.

Then, again, there was a very great lion there, exhibiting for a short time only, who also wished to see the little lion, and expressed keen regrets that it was not there according to appointment. The great lion was Mr. Quicksilver, who had stepped in for about half-an-hour, merely to show himself; and when he heard of the expected arrival of his little client, it occurred to Mr. Quicksilver, who could see several inches beyond by no means a short nose, that Mr. Titmouse had gained a verdict which would very soon make him *patron of the borough of Yatton*—that he probably would not think of sitting for the borough himself, and that a little public civility bestowed upon Mr. Titmouse, by the great Mr. Quicksilver, one of the counsel to whose splendid exertions he was indebted for his all, might be, as it were, *bread thrown upon the waters to be found after many days*. It was true that Mr. Quicksilver, in a bitter stream of eloquent invective, had repeatedly denounced the system of close and rotten boroughs; but his heart, all the while, secretly rebelled; and he knew that a snug borough was a thing on every account not to be sneezed at. He sat for one himself, though he had also contested several counties: but that was expensive and harassing work; and the borough for which he at present sat, he had paid far

too high a price for. He had no objection to the existence of close boroughs; but only to so many of them being in the hands of the opposite party. So Mr. Quicksilver really regretted the absence of his little friend and client, Mr. Titmouse.

Thus, and by such persons, and on such grounds, was lamented the absence of Mr. Titmouse from the ball of the Lady Mayoress of York; none, however, knowing the cause which kept him from so select and distinguished an assembly. As soon as Mr. Gammon had seen him properly attended to, and expressed an anxious sympathy for him, he set out for a walk—a quiet solitary walk round the ancient walls of York. If on a fine night you look up into the sky, and see it gleaming with innumerable stars, and then fix your eye intently, *without wavering*, upon some one star; however vivid and brilliant may be those in its immediate vicinity, they will disappear utterly, and that on which your eye is fixed will seem alone in its glory—sole star in the firmament. Something of this kind happened with Mr. Gammon when on the walls of York—now slowly, then rapidly walking, now standing, then sitting; all the objects which generally occupied his thoughts faded away, before one on which his mind's eye was then fixed with unwavering intensity—the visage of Miss Aubrey. The golden fruit that was on the eve of dropping into the hands of the firm—ten thousand pounds—the indefinite and varied advantages to himself, personally, to which their recent successes might be turned, all vanished. What would he not undergo, what would he not sacrifice, to secure the favour of Miss Aubrey? Beautiful being—all innocence, elegance, refinement;—to possess her would elevate him in the scale of being; it would purify his feelings, it would ennoble his nature. What was too arduous or desperate to be undertaken to secure a prize so glorious as this?

“No, I have not a chance—not a chance!” at length he thought to himself—“That girl will be prouder in her poverty than ever she would have been in her wealth and splendour. Who am I?—a partner in the firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; a firm in bad odour with the profession; looking for practice from polluted sources, with a host of miscreants for clients—faugh! faugh! I feel contaminated and degraded! My name even is against me; it is growing into a by-word. We must push our advantage—they must be driven from Yatton he, she—all of them; yes, all.” He paused for a long time, and a sort of pang passed through his mind. “They are to make way for—Titmouse!—for Titmouse!! And he, too, loves her—*bah!*” He involuntarily uttered this sound fiercely, and aloud. “But stay—he really is in love with Miss Aubrey—that I know;—ah! I can turn it to good purpose; it will give me, by the way, a hold upon the little fool; I will make him believe that through my means he may obtain Miss Aubrey! Misery may make her accessible; I can easily bring myself into contact with them, in their distress; for there are the *mesne profits*—*the mesne profits!* Heavens! how glorious, but how dreadful an engine are *they!* They will help to batter down the high wall of pride that surrounds *them* and *her*; but it will require infinite care and tact in the use of such an engine! I will be all delicacy—gentleness—generosity; I will appear friendly to her, and to her brother; and, if needs must be, why he must be *crushed*. There is no help for it. He looks decidedly, by the way, a man of intellect. I wonder how he bears it—how they all bear it—how *she* bears it! *Beggared beauty*—there's something touching in the very sound! How little they think of the power that is at this moment in my hands!”

Here a long interval elapsed, during which his thoughts had wandered towards more practical matters. “If they don't get a rule *visi*, next term, we shall be in a position to ask them what course they intend to pursue. Gad, they may, if so disposed, hold out for—how very cold it is!”—he buttoned

his coat—"and, what have I been thinking of? Really I have been dreaming; or am I as great a fool as Tittlebat?" Within a few minutes' time he had quitted the walls, and descended, through one of the turreted gateways, into the town.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN, about seven o'clock on the morning after the delivery of the verdict, which, if sustained, consigned the Aubreys to beggary, they met to partake of a slight and hasty breakfast before setting off for Yatton; the countenances of each bore the traces of great suffering, and also of the efforts made to conceal it. They saluted each other with fervent affection, each attempting a smile—but a smile, how wan and forced! "The moment has arrived, dear Agnes and Kate," said her brother with a fond air but a firm voice, as his sister was preparing tea, in silence, fearful of looking at either her brother or sister-in-law; "the moment has arrived that is to try what stuff we are made of. If we have any strength, this is the time to show it!"

"I'm sure I thought of you both almost all night long!" replied Miss Aubrey tremulously. "You have a lion's heart, dear Charles; and yet you are so gentle with us——"

"I should be a poor creature indeed, Kate, to give way just when I ought to play the man. Come, dear Kate, I will remind you of a noble passage from our glorious Shakspeare. It braces one's nerves to hear it!" Then, with a fine impressive delivery, and kindling with excitement as he went on, Aubrey began—

"In the reproof of chance
Lies the true proof of men. The sea being smooth
How many shallow bauble boats dare sail
Upon her patient breast, making their way
With those of nobler bulk?
But let the ruffian Boreas once enrage
The gentle Thetis, and, anon, behold
The strong-ribb'd bark through liquid mountains cut,
Bounding between the two moist elements
Like Perseus' horse; where's then the saucy boat,
Whose weak untimber'd sides but even now
Co-rival'd greatness? Either to harbour fled,
Or made a toast for Neptune!—Even so,
Doth valour show, and valour's worth divide,
In storms of fortune."*

While he repeated the above lines, his sister's eye had been fixed upon him with a radiant expression of resolution, her heart responding to what she heard. She could not, however, speak when he had ceased. For herself she cared not; but when she looked at her brother, and thought of him, his wife, his children, her fortitude yielded before the moving array, and she burst into tears.

"Come, Kate—my own sweet, good Kate!" said he cheerfully, laying his hand upon hers, "we must keep constant guard against our *feelings*. They will be ever arraying before our eyes the past—the dear, delightful past—happy and beautiful, in mournful contrast with the present, and stirring up, every moment, a thousand secret and tender associations, calculated to shake our constancy. Whenever our eyes *do* turn to the past, let it be with humble gratitude to God for having allowed us all, in this changing world, so long an

* Troilus and Cressida, i 3

interval of happiness; such, indeed, as falls to the lot of few. *What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*"

"My own Charles!" exclaimed Mrs. Aubrey, rising and throwing her arms round her husband, whose countenance was calm and serene, as was the tone of the sentiments he expressed solemn and elevated. Miss Aubrey was overcome with her stronger feelings, and buried her face in her handkerchief. Shortly afterwards the carriage drew up, and also Dr. Tatham, on horseback.

"Good morning! good morning, my friends," cried he, cheerfully, as he entered, holding forth both his hands; "you can't think how fresh and pleasant the air is! The country for me, at all times of the year! I hate towns! Did you sleep well? I slept like a top all night long;—no I didn't either, by the way. Come, come, ladies! On with your bonnets and shawls!" Thus rattled on worthy little Doctor Tatham, in order to prevent anything being said which might disturb those whom he came to see, or cause his own highly-charged feelings to give way. The sight of Mrs. and Miss Aubrey, however, who greeted him in silence as they hastily drew on their bonnets and shawls, overcame his ill-assumed cheerfulness; and before he could bustle back, as he presently did, to the street door, his eyes were obstructed with tears, as he wrung the hand of Mr. Aubrey, who stood beside him, with convulsive energy. They soon set off, at a rapid pace, Dr. Tatham riding along beside the carriage. Yatton was about twelve miles off. For the first few miles they preserved a tolerable show of cheerfulness; but as they perceived themselves nearing Yatton, it became plainly more and more of an effort for any of them to speak. Dr. Tatham, also, talked to them seldomer through the windows. At one time he dropped considerably behind, at another he rode as much ahead.

"Oh, Charles, don't you dread to see Yatton?" said Miss Aubrey suddenly, as they turned a familiar corner of the road. Neither of them replied to her.

"When you come to the village," said Mr. Aubrey presently, to the postilion, "drive through it, right up to the Hall, as quickly as you can." He was obeyed. As they passed through the village with their windows up, none of them seemed disposed to look through, but leaned back, in silence, in their seats.

"God bless you! God bless you! I shall call in the evening," exclaimed Doctor Tatham; as, having reached the Vicarage, he hastily waved his hand, and turned off. Soon they had passed the park gates; when had they entered it before with such heavy hearts—with eyes so dreading to encounter every familiar object that met them? Alas! the spacious park was no longer theirs; not a tree, not a shrub, not a flower, not an inch of ground; the trees all putting forth their fresh green leaves—nothing was theirs; the fine old turreted gateway, an object always, hitherto, of peculiar pride and attachment, their hearts seemed to tremble as they rattled under it.

"Courage, my sweet loves! Courage! courage!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, grasping each of their hands, and then they burst into tears. Mr. Aubrey felt his own fortitude grievously shaken as he entered the old Hall, no longer his *home*, and reflected, moreover—bitterest thought of all—that he had been declared by the law to have been hitherto the wrongful occupant of it; that he must forthwith proceed "to set his house in order," and prepare for a dreadful reckoning with him whom the law had declared to be the true owner of Yatton.

The formal result of the trial at York was, as has been already intimated, to declare Mr. Titmouse entitled to recover possession of only that insignificant portion of the estates held by Jacob Jolter; and that, too, only in the event of the first four days of the ensuing term elapsing, without any successful attempt being made to impeach, before the court, the propriety of the verdict of the jury. Thus, then, it appears, that the hands of Mr. Titmouse and his advisers were at all events stayed till the first four days of Easter term should have

elapsed. During the considerable interval thus afforded to the advisers of Mr. Aubrey, his case, as it appeared upon the notes of his counsel on their briefs, with the indirect assistance and corroboration derived from the shorthand writers' notes, underwent repeated and most anxious examination in all its parts and bearings, by all his legal advisers. It need hardly be said, that every point in the case favourable to their client had been distinctly and fully raised by the Attorney-General, assisted by his very able juniors, Mr. Sterling and Mr. Crystal; and so was it with the counsel of Mr. Titmouse, as, indeed, the result showed. On subsequent examination, none of them could discover any false step, or any advantage which had been overlooked, or taken inefficiently. Independently of various astute objections taken by the Attorney-General to the reception of several important portions of the plaintiff's evidence, the leading points relied on in favour of Mr. Aubrey were—the impropriety of Lord Widdrington's rejection of the deed of confirmation on account of the erasure in it; the effect of that deed, assuming the erasure not to have warranted its rejection; and several questions arising out of the doctrine of adverse possession, by which alone, it had been contended at the trial, the claim of the descendants of Stephen Dreddlington had been peremptorily and finally barred. Two very long consultations had been held at the Attorney-General's chambers, attended by Mr. Sterling, Mr. Crystal, Mr. Mansfield, the three partners in the firm of Runnington and Company, Mr. Parkinson, and Mr. Aubrey, who had come up to town for the purpose alone. Greatly to the surprise of all of them, he stated most distinctly and emphatically that he insisted on no ground of objection being taken against his opponent, except such as was strictly just, equitable, honourable, and conscientious. Rather than defeat him on mere technicalities—rather than avail himself of mere positive rules of law, while the *right*, as between man and man, was substantially in favour of his opponent—Mr. Aubrey declared, however absurd or Quixotic he might be thought, that he would, if he had them, lose fifty Yattons. *Fiat justitia, ruat cælum*. “You mean to say, Aubrey,” interrupted the Attorney-General mildly, after listening for some time to his friend and client with evident interest, and admiration of his pure and high-minded character, “that it would be unconscientious of you to avail yourself of a fixed and beneficial rule of law, established upon considerations of general equity and utility—such, for instance, as that of adverse possession in order to retain possession, while—”

“Pray Mr. Attorney-General, if I had lent you five hundred pounds seven or eight years ago, would you set up the *statute of limitations* against me when I asked for repayment?”

“Excuse me, Aubrey,” replied the Attorney-General, with a faint flush upon his handsome and dignified features; “but how idle all this is! One would imagine that we were sitting in a school of casuistry! What are we met for, in the name of common sense? For what, but to prevent the rightful owner of property from being deprived of it by a trumpety accidental erasure in one of his title-deeds, which time has deprived him of the means of accounting for?” He then, in a very kind way, but with a dash of peremptoriness, requested that the case might be left in their hands, and that they might be given credit for resorting to nothing that was inconsistent with the nicest and most fastidious sense of honour. This observation put an end to so unprecedented an interference; but if Mr. Aubrey supposed that it had any effect upon the Attorney-General, he was mistaken; for of course that learned and eminent person secretly resolved to avail himself of every conceivable means, great and small, available for overturning the verdict, and securing the Aubreys in the possession of Yatton. He at the same time earnestly endeavoured to moderate the expectations of his client, declaring that he was by no means

sanguine as to the issue; that Lord Widdrington's rulings at *Nisi Prius* were very formidable things—in fact rarely assailable; and then, again, the senior puisne judge of the court—Mr. Justice Grayley—had been consulted by Lord Widdrington at the trial and concurred with him in his principal ruling, now sought to be moved against. At the close of the second consultation, on the night of the first day in Easter term (the Attorney-General intending to move on the ensuing morning), after having finally gone over the case in all its bearings, and agreed upon the exact grounds of moving—the Attorney-General called back Mr. Runnington for a moment, as he was walking away with Mr. Aubrey, and whispered to him, that it would be very proper to assume at once that the motion failed; and consider the best mode of negotiating concerning the surrender of the bulk of the property, and the payment of the mesne profits.

"Oh! Mr. Aubrey has quite made up his mind to the worst, Mr. Attorney-General."

"Ah, well!" replied the Attorney-General with a sigh; and about five minutes after Mr. Runnington's departure, the Attorney-General stepped into his carriage, which had been standing for the last hour opposite his chambers. He drove down to the House of Commons, where he almost immediately after delivered a long and luminous speech on one of the most important and intricate questions that had been discussed during the session. The first four days of term are an awkward interval equally to incompetent counsel and incompetent judges—where such there are. The slips of both then come to light; both have to encounter the keen and vigilant scrutiny of a learned, acute, and independent body—the English bar.

The spectacle presented by the court in *banc*, to a thoughtful observer, is interesting and imposing. Here, for instance, was the Court of King's Bench, presided over by Lord Widdrington, with three puisne judges—all men of powerful understandings, of great experience, and of deep and extensive legal knowledge. Observe the dignified calmness and patience with which counsel are listened to, verbose even and tiresome as occasionally they are; the judges not deranging their thoughts, or the order in which the argument has been, with much anxiety and care, prepared for them beforehand—by incessant suggestions of crude and hasty impressions—but suspending their judgment till fully possessed of the case brought before them by one whom his client has thought fit to entrust with the conduct of his case. They never interfere but in extreme cases, when the time of the court is being plainly wasted by loose irrelevant matter. Their demeanour is characterized by grave courtesy and forbearance; and their occasional interference is received by the bar with profound respect, and anxious attention.

But I forgot that I had brought the reader into the Court of King's Bench, where he has been standing all this while, watching Lord Widdrington "go through the bar," as it is termed; namely, calling on all the counsel present, in the order of their seniority or position, to make any little motion, of course, before proceeding with the principal business of the day. All the bar had been gone through, in about half-an-hour's time; during which the Attorney-General had come into court, and arranged all his books and papers before him; Mr. Subtle sitting next to him with a slip of paper before him, to take a note of the grounds on which he moved.

"Does any other gentleman move?" inquired Lord Widdrington, looking over the court. He received no answer.

"Mr. Attorney-General," said he; and the Attorney-General rose—

"If your Lordship pleases," commenced the Attorney-General, slowly rising, and bowing—"in a case of *DOE* on the Demise of *TITMOUSE* against *JOLTER*, tried before your Lordship at the last assizes for the county of York, I have humbly to move your Lordship for a rule to show cause why a nonsuit should

not be entered, or why the verdict entered for the plaintiff should not be set aside, and a New Trial had." He proceeded to state the facts of the case, and what had taken place at the trial, with great clearness and brevity. As soon as he had sat down, the court consulted together for a minute or two; and then—

"You may take a rule to show cause, Mr. Attorney-General," said Lord Widdrington. "On all the grounds I have mentioned, my Lord?" "I shall discharge your rule," whispered Mr. Subtle to the Attorney-General. "I'm afraid you will," whispered the Attorney-General, leaning his head close to Mr. Subtle, and with his hand before his mouth. Then his clerk removed the battery of books which stood before him, together with his brief; and taking another out of his turgid red bag, the Attorney-General was soon deep in the details of an important shipping case, in which he was going to move when next it came to his turn.

Thus the court had granted a "*Rule Nisi*," as it is called (*i.e.*, it commanded a particular thing to be done—"unless" sufficient "*cause*" could be thereafter shown to the court why it should not be done), for either entering a nonsuit, or having a new trial. Now, had this rule been obtained in the present day, at least two years must have elapsed, owing to the immense and perhaps unavoidable arrear of business, before the other side could have been heard in answer to it. Now, had such been the state of business at the time when the rule in *Doe d. Titmouse v. Jolter* was moved for, see the practical effect of it; had Mr. Aubrey, instead of the high-minded and conscientious man he undoubtedly was, been a rogue, he might have had the opportunity of getting in twenty thousand pounds, and setting off with it to spend upon the Continent, as soon as he found that the court had decided against him; or, if the tenants should have been served with notice not to pay their rents to any one but Mr. Titmouse—at all events not to Mr. Aubrey—how was Mr. Aubrey and his family to have subsisted during this interval?—and with the possibility that, at the end of the two years, Mr. Aubrey might be declared to be the true owner of Yatton, and consequently all the while entitled to those rents, etc., the non-payment of which might have entailed upon him the most serious embarrassments. During the same interval, poor Mr. Titmouse, heart-sick with hope deferred, might have taken to liquor, as a solace under his misery, and drunk himself to death before the rule was discharged—or brought his valuable life to a more sudden and abrupt conclusion; which affecting event would have relieved the court from deciding several troublesome points of law, and kept the Aubreys in possession of the Yatton estates. Within ten or twelve days after the rule *nisi*, in the present case, had been moved, "cause was shown" against it by Mr. Subtle and Mr. Lynx, and very admirably shown against it too. The Attorney-General exerted himself to the utmost in support of his rule. He felt that the court—though scarcely at all interfering during his address—was against him; yet he delivered, perhaps, one of the most masterly arguments that had ever been heard in the place where he was speaking. Mr. Sterling and Mr. Crystal, wisely avoiding the ground so admirably occupied by the Attorney-General, contented themselves with strengthening those positions which appeared to them less fortified by positive authority than the others; and then the court said they would take a day or two's time to consider: "less on account," said Lord Widdrington, "of the difficulty of the case, than the magnitude of the interests which would probably be affected by their decision."

"You have them dead with you, Subtle," whispered the Attorney-General, a slight expression of chagrin stealing over his features, as he heard the observation of Lord Widdrington.

"I never doubted it," replied Mr. Subtle with a confident air. Every day

afterwards, from the sitting to the rising of the court, did the anxious Aubrey attend in the King's Bench, to hear the judgment of the court delivered. At length arrived the last day of the term. Soon after the sitting of the court, Lord Widdrington pronounced judgment in two or three cases; but not seeing the Attorney-General (who was engaged before the House of Lords) in his place, delayed giving judgment in the case of Doe and Jolter. About two o'clock he made his appearance; and shortly afterwards, Lord Widdrington, after disposing of the matter then before the court, said—"There was a case of Doe on the demise of Titmouse against Jolter, in which, early in the term, a rule was obtained, calling upon the lessor of the plaintiff to show cause why"—and he proceeded to state the rule, and then to deliver the written unanimous judgment of the court. A clear and elaborate statement of the facts, out of which the questions submitted to the court had arisen, and of those questions themselves, was listened to by Mr. Aubrey in breathless suspense, before he could obtain the faintest intimation of the judgment which the court was about to pronounce. Lord Widdrington went on to dispose, one by one, with painful deliberation and precision, of the seven points presented for the decision of the court. One or two questions they decided in favour of the defendant; but added, that it had become unnecessary to do so, in consequence of the answers given by the witnesses to other questions, at the trial, and which disposed of the doubts arising on the former questions. The documentary evidence, subsequently put in, got rid of another difficulty in the early part of the plaintiff's case, and rendered immaterial a question put by the plaintiff's counsel, and strenuously objected to on the part of the defendant; which question the court was of opinion, as had been Lord Widdrington at the trial, ought not to have been allowed. Then as to the question of *adverse possession*, on which very great stress had been laid by the defendant's counsel, the court was of opinion that none existed; since there had been a *disability*—indeed, a series of disabilities,—through infancy, coverture, and absence beyond seas, of the various parties through whom the lessor of the plaintiff claimed. Finally, as to the question concerning the *erasure*, the court was clearly of opinion, that the deed in which it occurred had been properly rejected; inasmuch as the erasure occurred in a clearly material part of the deed, and there were no recitals in the deed by which it could be helped. That it was clearly incumbent upon those proffering the deed in evidence, to account for its altered appearance, although the deed was more than thirty years old, and rebut the presumption of fraud arising therefrom. That the erasure was a clear badge of fraud! and to hold otherwise would be to open a wide door to frauds of the most extensive and serious description. That there had been no evidence offered to show that the deed had ever been a valid deed; the very first step failed; and, in short, in its then state, it was in contemplation of law *no deed at all*; and, consequently, had been properly rejected. "For all these reasons, therefore, we are clearly of opinion, that the verdict ought not to be disturbed, and the rule will consequently be *discharged*." As these last words were pronounced, a mist seemed for a moment to intervene between Mr. Aubrey and the objects around him; for his thoughts had reverted to Yatton, and the precious objects of his affection who were there, in sickening suspense, awaiting the event which had that moment taken place. The words, yet sounding in his excited ears, seemed like the sentence of expulsion from Paradise passed upon our dismayed and heart-broken first parents. Yes, in that solemn region of matter-of-fact and common-place—that *dead sea*, as far as feeling, sentiment, incident, or excitement is concerned, the Court of King's Bench—there sat a man of exquisite sensibility—pure and high-minded—whose feelings were for a while paralysed by the words which had fallen from the judgment-seat, uttered with a cold, business-like, indifferent air—oh! how horribly out of

concert with the anxious and excited tone of him whom, with his lovely family, they consigned, in fact, to destitution! After remaining for about a quarter of an hour, during which brief interval he resumed the control over his feelings which he had so long and successfully struggled to maintain, he rose, and quitted the court.

It was a heavy, lowering afternoon—one which seemed to harmonize with the gloomy and desolate mood in which he slowly walked homeward. He encountered many of his friends, on foot, on horseback, and in carriages, on their way down to the Houses of Parliament; the very sight of them, in the morbid state of his feelings, gave him a pang that was indescribable. With them matters were the same as they had ever been—as they had till then been with him—and as probably they would be with them to the end of their career; but he had been forced, suddenly and for ever, to quit the scene of high excitement—he heaved many heavy sighs, as he exchanged nod after nod with those he met, as he approached Charing Cross. There he encountered Lord C —, the brilliant Foreign Secretary, arm in arm with two eloquent and leading members of the Government—all of them evidently in high spirits, on their way down to the House.

“Ah!—Aubrey!—In town!—An age since we met!”—exclaimed they, in a breath, shaking him cordially by the hand.—“You know, of course, that the budget comes on to-night—he? —” “I assure you,” said Lord C —. “our friends will do us great service—very essential service, by being early in their attendance!—You know that Mr. Quicksilver intends to come out against us to-night in great force?—My dear Aubrey, you are going the wrong way.” “I am not going down to the House to-night.” “Not going down?—Eh?—My dear Aubrey, you astonish me!—Have you paired off? You can’t think how I lament your absence!” “I am returning to Yorkshire almost immediately.” “But surely you can come for an hour, or so, to-night—eh? Come? Don’t let a trifle stand in the way.” “I would *not* let a trifle stand in the way,” replied Mr. Aubrey, in a tone and manner that at once arrested the attention of them whom he was addressing, and suddenly reminded them of what, in their political eagerness, they had for a moment lost sight of—namely, the perilous position of his private affairs.

“My dear Aubrey, I beg a thousand pardons for intruding such matters upon you,” said Lord C —, with sudden earnestness; “but shall we have an opportunity of meeting before you leave town?” “I fear—*not*;—I set off by the mail to-morrow evening—and have in the meantime much to attend to,” said Mr. Aubrey, unable to repress a sigh—and they parted. But for a determination not to yield to a morbid sensibility, he would have got into a hackney-coach, and so have avoided the “troops of friends,” the hosts of “old familiar faces,” all wending down to the scene in which he had begun so eminently to distinguish himself—but from which he seemed now to be for ever excluded. He, therefore, pursued his way on foot. One of those on whom his troubled eye lit, was a well-known figure on horseback—the great Duke of —, on his way down to the House of Lords, going very slowly, his head inclined on one side, his iron-cast features overspread with an expression of stern thoughtfulness. He did not observe Mr. Aubrey—in fact, he seemed too much absorbed with his own thoughts to observe or recognise anybody; yet he now and then mechanically raised his finger to his hat, in acknowledgment of the obeisances of those whom he met. Poor Aubrey sighed; and felt as if circumstances had placed him at an immeasurable distance from him whom, so lately, he had entertained familiarly at dinner; that there seemed suddenly to have arisen, it as were, a great and impassable gulf between them.

On reaching his house in Grosvenor Street, his heart fluttered while he knocked and rang; and he seemed to shrink from the accustomed obsequious

voice and manner of the powdered menial who admitted him. Having ordered a slight dinner, he repaired to his library. The only letter which had arrived since he had left in the morning, bore the Griston post-mark, and was in the handwriting of Mrs. Aubrey. He opened it with trembling eagerness. It was crossed—the dear familiar handwriting!—from beginning to end, and full of heart-subduing tenderness. Then it had a little enclosure, with a strange, straggling superscription, “To my Papa”; and on opening it he read, in similar characters—

“My dear Papa, I love you very very much. Do come home. Mamma sends her love. Your dutiful son,

“CHARLES AUBREY.

“P.S.—Agnes sends her love; she cannot write because she is so little. Please to come home directly.

“CHARLES A., Yatton.”

Aubrey saw how it was—that Mrs. Aubrey had either affected to write in her little son's name, or had actually guided his pen. On the outside she had written in pencil. “Charles says he hopes that you will answer his letter directly.”

Aubrey's lip quivered, and his eyes filled with tears. Putting the letters into his bosom, he rose and walked to and fro, with feelings which cannot be described. The evening was very gloomy; it poured with rain incessantly. He was the only person in that spacious and elegant house, except the servants left in charge of it; and dreary and desolate enough it felt. He was but its nominal owner—their nominal master! In order to save the post, he sat down to write home—(*home!* his heart sank within him at the thought)—and informed Mrs. Aubrey and his sister of the event for which his previous letters had prepared them; adding that he should set off for Yatton by the mail of the ensuing night, and that he was perfectly well. He also wrote a line or two, in large printed characters, by way of answer to his little correspondent, his son, towards whom how his heart yearned! and having dispatched his packet, probably the last he should ever frank, he partook of a hasty and slight dinner, and then resigned himself to deep meditation upon his critical circumstances. He was perfectly aware of his precise position, in point of law, namely, that he was safe in the possession of the Yatton property (with the exception of the trifle which was occupied by Jolter, and had been the object of the action just determined), till another action should have been brought, directly seeking its recovery; and that by forcing his opponent to bring such action, he might put him to considerable risk of retaining his verdict, and thereby greatly harass him, and ward off, indefinitely, the evil day for himself. By these means he might secure time, possibly, also, favourable terms for the payment of the dreadful *mesne profits*, in which he stood indebted to his successor. To this effect he had received several intimations from as upright and conscientious an adviser, Mr. Runnington, as was to be found in the profession. But Mr. Aubrey had decided upon his course; he had taken his ground, and intended to maintain it. However sudden and unlooked-for had been the claim set up against him, it had been deliberately and solemnly confirmed by the law of the land; and he had no idea but of yielding it a prompt and hearty obedience. He resolved, therefore, to waste no time—to fritter away no energy in feeble dalliance with trouble; but to face her boldly, and comply with all her exactions. He would, on the morrow, instruct Mr. Runnington to write to his opponent's solicitors, informing them that within three weeks' time the estates at Yatton would be delivered up

to their client, Mr. Titmouse. He would also direct his own private solicitor to arrange for the quickest possible disposal of his house in Grosvenor Street, and his wines and his furniture, both there and at Yatton. He resolved, moreover, on the morrow, to take the necessary steps for vacating his seat in Parliament, by applying for the Stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds; and having determined on these arrangements, consequent upon the adverse decision of the Court of King's Bench of that day, he felt the momentary relief and satisfaction of the seaman who has prepared his vessel for the approaching storm. He felt, indeed, relieved for a while from a dreadful pressure.

"And what, now, have I really to complain of?" said he to himself; "why murmur presumptuously and vainly against the dispensations of Providence? I thank God that I am still able to recognise His hand in what has befallen me, and to believe that *He hath done all things well*; that prosperity and adversity are equally, from Him, means of accomplishing His all-wise purposes! Is it for me, poor insect! to question the goodness, the wisdom, or the justice of my Maker? I thank God for the firm belief I have that *He governs the world in righteousness*, and that He has declared that He will protect and bless them who sincerely endeavour to discover, and conform to, His will concerning them. He it was that placed me in my late condition of prosperity and eminence: why should I fret, when He sees fit gently to remove me from it, and place me in a different sphere of exertion and suffering? Shall I not lessen my own sufferings by the contemplation of those which the Almighty has thought fit to inflict upon my brethren? What if I, and those whom I love, were the subjects of direful disease—of vice—of dishonour? What if I were the object of a just and universal contempt, given up to a reprobate mind; miserable here, and without hope hereafter? Here have I health, a loving family—have had the inestimable advantages of education, and even now, in the imminent approach of danger, am enabled to preserve, in some measure, a composure of feeling, a resolution which will support me, and those who are dearer to me than life." Here his heart beat quickly, and he walked rapidly to and fro. "I am confident that Providence will care for them! As for me, even in sight of the more serious and startling peril that menaces me—what is it to a Christian, but a trial of his constancy? *There hath no temptation taken you, say the Scriptures written for our instruction, but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able, but will with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*"

"They are determined not to let the grass grow underneath their feet, Mr. Aubrey," said Mr. Runnington, who, the next morning, made his appearance at breakfast, pursuant to appointment; "within two hours' time of the court delivering judgment, yesterday afternoon, I received the following communication." He handed to Mr. Aubrey this letter:—

"Saffron Hill, 25th April, 18—

"GENTLEMEN,

"Doe d. Titmouse v. Jolter.

"The rule for a new trial herein having been this day discharged, and the unanimous judgment of the court delivered in favour of the claims to the Yatton estate of the lessor of the plaintiff in the present action, we shall feel obliged by an intimation from you, at your earliest possible convenience, of the course which your client may now think fit to adopt. You are, of course, aware that we are now in a situation to attack, successfully, the entire property at Yatton, at present in the possession of Mr. Aubrey; and that, had we thought fit, we might have sought and recovered it all in the action which

has just been decided in favour of our client. It is now in our power materially to strengthen the evidence adduced at the late trial; and we beg to be informed whether it is your client's intention to put Mr. Titmouse to the enormous expense, and the delay of a second trial, the issue of which cannot be doubtful; or, with the promptitude and candour which are to be expected from a gentleman of the station and character of your client, at once yield to our client the substantial fruits of his verdict. If his reasonable wishes in this matter be disregarded, we would merely intimate that it will be for your client most seriously to weigh the consequences; to see whether such a line of conduct may not greatly prejudice his interests, and place him in a far worse position than, perhaps, he would otherwise have occupied. As we understand your client to be in town, we trust you will forgive us for requesting you immediately to communicate with him, and at your earliest convenience enable us to announce the result to our client.—We are, gentlemen, your obedient servants,

“QUIRK, GAMMON, & SNAP.

“Messrs. RUNNINGTON & Co.”

“Well—I own I see nothing to find fault with in this letter said Mr. Aubrey calmly, but with a suppressed sigh, as soon as he had read the letter.

“Rather quick work, too—is it not, Mr. Aubrey?—within an hour or two after judgment pronounced in their favour:—but, to be sure, it's very excusable, when you consider the line of business and the sort of clients that Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap are accustomed to.”

“I have made up my mind as to the course I shall adopt,” said Mr. Aubrey. “Oh, of course, that is quite clear!” said Mr. Runnington, pouring out his coffee—“we shall stand another shot, and see if there's ammunition enough left for the purpose: and we'll tender a bill of exceptions, and carry the case into the Exchequer chamber, and thence into the House of Lords—ah! we'll *work* them, I warrant them!”—and he rubbed his hands, with a little excitement in his manner.

“Why, Mr. Runnington,” answered Mr. Aubrey gravely, “would it not be wanton—most unconscientious in me to put them to the expense and anxiety of a second trial, when the whole case, on both sides, has been fairly brought before both the court and the jury?” “Good Heavens, Mr. Aubrey! who ever heard of an estate of ten thousand a-year being surrendered after one assault?” “If it were ten thousand times ten thousand a-year, I would submit, after such a trial as ours.” “How do we know what fraud and perjury may have been resorted to in order to secure the late verdict, and which we may have the means of exploding against the next trial? Ah, Mr. Aubrey, you don't know the character of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap in the profession; they learn a fresh trick from every scoundrel, swindler, and thief, whose case they undertake.” “I thought that fraud and perjury were never to be presumed, Mr. Runnington! Besides, had we not the advantage of most acute and experienced counsel? How could it escape *them*?” “I would only venture to remind you, said Mr. Runnington, firmly, but respectfully, “of the observations of the Attorney-General, at our last consultation.” “I thought I was unanswered, Mr. Runnington, though I did not feel at liberty to press the matter,” replied Mr. Aubrey with a melancholy smile.

“Excuse me, but we *must* take the chance of a second trial,” said Mr. Runnington.

“I have decided upon the course I shall adopt,” replied Mr. Aubrey, calmly and determinedly—“I shall instruct you to write this day to the gentlemen upon the other side, and inform them that within three weeks I shall be prepared to deliver up possession of Yatton.”

"My dear sir!—Do I hear aright? Deliver up possession of the estates? and within three weeks?" "That was what I said, Mr. Runnington," replied Mr. Aubrey rather peremptorily. "I give you my honour, Mr. Aubrey, that in the whole course of my practice I never heard of such a procedure." "And I shall further request you to state that the last quarter's rents are in my banker's hands, and will be paid over to the order of Mr. Titmouse." "Good gracious, Mr. Aubrey!" interrupted Mr. Runnington, with an air of deep concern. "I have well considered the position in which I am placed," said Mr. Aubrey with a serious air.

"It is very painful for me to mention the subject, Mr. Aubrey; but have you adverted to the *mesne* profits?" "I have. It is, indeed, a very fearful matter: and I frankly own that I see no way open before me, but to trust to the forbearance of——" "Forbearance!—The *forbearance* of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap!! or of any one counselled by them!" "Why, what can I do? I might as well undertake to pay off the national debt as the sum of sixty thousand pounds." "That's just the very thing," replied Mr. Runnington with a dismayed air.

"Whatever honourable negotiation can effect, I leave it in your hands to do. With reference to the time that may be obtained for the liquidation of it,"—Mr. Aubrey changed colour, but spoke with firmness—"I must own that this is a matter that has occasioned me inexpressible anxiety, Mr. Runnington. I really do not see what length of time will enable me to discharge so fearful a sum of money, or even to make any sensible impression upon it. I am quite at their mercy." Here both maintained a silence of several minutes' duration.

"I am far from thinking it clear that equity would not interpose to relieve against *mesne* profits, in such a case as the present—a dormant claim set up."

"I cannot see, Mr. Runnington, on what principle such an interference could be supported."

"No more do I, at present," replied Mr. Runnington, "but I'll lose no time in having the best advice on the subject. Gracious me! when one thinks of it, it deprives one of——" at this moment a thundering appeal to the knocker of the door announced an arrival: and presently the servant entered and stated that Lord C—— had called, and was waiting in the library. After repeating two or three directions to Mr. Runnington, Mr. Aubrey begged to be excused, and presently entered the library, where Lord C—— was waiting to receive him. Lord C—— was a middle-aged man, tall, of elegant person, a strikingly handsome countenance, and most winning address; he was a thorough politician, possessed of eloquence, immense practical knowledge, and a very commanding intellect. He was made for eminent office, and got through the most complicated and harassing business with singular ease and celerity. He had for several years entertained a sincere regard for Mr. Aubrey, whom he considered to be a very rising man in the House of Commons, and who had, on several occasions, rendered him special service in debate. He had been much shocked to hear of the sudden misfortune which had befallen Mr. Aubrey; and had now come to him with a sincere desire to be of service to him; and also, not without a faint hope of prevailing upon him to come down that evening and support them in a very close division. He was as kind-hearted a man as a keen politician could be.

"I am really shocked beyond expression to hear all this," said he after Aubrey had, at his earnest request, explained the position in which he was placed; the dreadful loss he had sustained, the still more dreadful liabilities to which he was subject. "Really who can be safe? It might have happened to me—to any of us! Forgive me, my dear Aubrey," continued Lord C—— earnestly, "if I venture to express a hope that at all events Mrs. Aubrey and your family are provided for, and your very lovely sister; she, I trust, is out of

the reach of inconvenience?" Mr. Aubrey's lip quivered, and he remained silent. "Allow me a friend's freedom, Aubrey, and let me repeat my question; are your family provided for?"

"I will be frank, Lord C——," replied Mr. Aubrey, with a strong effort to preserve his composure. "The little provision that was made for them goes with Yatton: but for them—my wife, my children, my sister—I could have submitted to this misfortune with unshrinking fortitude; but they are, alas, involved in my ruin! My wife had nothing when I married her; and of course the settlements I made on her were out of the Yatton property; as also was the little income left my sister by my father. With Yatton all is gone—that is the plain fact; and there is no disguising it."—Lord C—— seemed much moved. "The Duke of ——, I, and two or three other of your friends, were talking about these matters last night; we wish we could serve you. What is the sort of foreign service you would prefer Aubrey?" "*Foreign service*," echoed Mr. Aubrey significantly. "Yes; an entire change of scene would be highly serviceable in diverting your thoughts from the distressing subjects which here occupy them, and must continue to occupy them for some time to come."

"It is very kindly meant, Lord C——; but do you really think I can for a single moment entertain the idea of quitting the country to escape from pecuniary liability?"

"That's the point exactly; I decidedly think you ought to do so; that you *must*," replied Lord C—— in a matter-of-fact manner.

"Nothing upon earth shall induce me to do so," replied Mr. Aubrey firmly. "The bare idea shocks me. It would be the meanest, most unprincipled conduct—it would reflect disgrace on the King's service."

"Poh—this is mere eccentricity—knight-errantry; I'm sure that when you are in a calmer mood you will think differently. Upon my honour, I never heard of such a thing in my life. Are you to stay at home, to have your hands tied behind your back, and be thrust into prison—to court destruction for yourself and your family?" Mr. Aubrey turned aside his head, and remained silent.

"I must plead in favour of Mrs. Aubrey—your children—your sweet lovely sister;—good God! it's quite shocking to think what you are bringing them to."

"You torture my feelings, Lord C——," said Mr. Aubrey tremulously and very pale; "but you do not convince my judgment. Every dictate of conscience and honour combine to assure me that I should not listen to your proposal."

"Good God! what an outrage on common sense!—But has anything been yet said on the subject of these liabilities—these *mesne* profits, as I suppose they are called?" "Nothing; but they follow as a matter of course." "How is it that you owe *only* sixty thousand pounds, Aubrey?" "*Only* sixty thousand!" "At the rate of ten thousand a-year, you must have had at least a hundred thousand pounds of the money belonging to your successor ——." "The statute of limitations prevents more than six years' arrears being recoverable."

"But do you intend, Aubrey, to avail yourself of such a protection against the just claims of this poor, unfortunate, ill-used gentleman? Are not the remaining forty thousand pounds justly due—money of his which you have been making away with? Will you let a mere technical rule of law outweigh the dictates of honour and conscience?"

"I really don't exactly understand your drift, Lord C——," said Mr. Aubrey, colouring visibly and rapidly.

"Your sovereign has a right to command your services; and, by obeying him and serving your country, you are enabled to prevent a malignant opponent

from ruining you and your family, by extorting a vast sum of money not equitably due: I protest I see no difference in principle, Aubrey, between availing yourself of the statute of limitations, and of the call of the King to foreign service;—but we must talk of this again. By the way, what is the name of your worthy opponent? Tittlemouse, or some such strange name?"

"Titmouse!—By the way, you lose a seat for Yatton," said Aubrey, with a faint smile. Lord C—— pricked up his ears. "Ay, ay! how's that?" "The gentleman you have named professes, I understand, Liberal principles; probably he will sit for the borough himself; at all events, he will return the member."

"He's a poor ignorant creature, isn't he? What has made him take up with Liberal principles? By taking a little notice of him early, one might—eh?—influence him;—but—of course you don't intend to vacate this session?"

"I intend this day to apply for the Chiltern Hundreds; and this evening, if you like, a new writ may be moved for the borough of Yatton."

"You *must* come down to-night, my dear Aubrey, you really must," said Lord C——, with undisguised anxiety—with more than he had shown during the interview. "The numbers will run very close; they are stirring heaven and earth;—good heavens! my dear Aubrey, a vote's invaluable to-night;—Gad, you shan't have the Chiltern Hundreds; you musn't really apply for it—at all events, not till to-morrow."

"I shall sit no more in the House of Commons," said Mr. Aubrey, with a sad determined air; "besides, I leave for Yatton by to-night's mail. There are those waiting for me whom you would not have me disappoint, Lord C——!"

"Not for worlds, my dear Aubrey," replied Lord C——, half absently; he was intensely disappointed at not obtaining Mr. Aubrey's vote that evening; and rose to go. "Then I direct to Yatton, when I have occasion to write to you?" said he.

"For the next three weeks only. My movements after that period are not yet fixed."

"Adieu, Aubrey; and I entreat of you to remember me most sincerely to Mrs. Aubrey and your sister; and when you look at them, *remember—remember* our conversation of to-day."

With this Lord C——took his departure, and left poor Aubrey much depressed. He quickly, however, roused himself, and occupied the principal part of the day in making the necessary and melancholy arrangements for breaking up his establishment in Grosvenor Street, and for disposing of his wines, books, and furniture at Yatton. He also instructed a house-agent to look out for two or three respectable but small houses in the out-skirts of town, out of which they might choose the one which should appear most suitable to himself and Mrs. Aubrey, on their arrival in London. About eight o'clock he got into the York mail, and his heart was heavy within him.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE result of a very long consultation between Mr. Runnington and his partners, held on the day after his last interview with Mr. Aubrey, was, that he drew up the following draft of a letter, addressed to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap:—

"Lincoln's Inn, 26th April, 18—.

"GENTLEMEN—

"Doe d. Titmouse v. Jolter.

"In answer to your letter of yesterday (the 25th inst.), we beg to inform you, that after the judgment in this cause pronounced yesterday in the Court

of King's Bench, our client, Mr. Aubrey, does not intend to resist the claim of Mr. Titmouse to the residue of the Yatton property. We now, therefore, beg to give you notice that on the 17th of next month you will be at liberty, on behalf of your client, Mr. Titmouse, to take possession of all the property at Yatton, at present in the possession of Mr. Aubrey. The whole of the last quarter's rents, due at Lady-day, have been paid into the bank of Messrs. Harley, at Grilston, and will, on the 17th of May, be placed at the disposal of your client. We are also instructed to request the delivery of your bill at as early a period as may suit your convenience, with a view to its immediate examination and settlement. We cannot forbear adding, while thus implicitly following the instructions of our client, our very great surprise and regret at the course which he has thought fit to adopt; since we have the strongest reasons for believing, that had he been disposed to contest your client's claim further, in accordance with advice received from a high quarter, his case would have been materially strengthened, and your difficulties greatly increased. We feel confident that the magnanimity displayed by our client, will be duly appreciated by yours. We are, Gentlemen, your obedient servants,

"RUNNINGTON & Co.

"Messrs. QUIRK, GAMMON, & SNAP."

"Really," said Mr. Runnington, when he had read over the above to his partners, "I *must* throw in a word or two about those infernal *mesne profits*—yet it's a very ticklish subject, especially with such people as these.

One partner shook his head, and the other looked very thoughtful. "We must not compromise Mr. Aubrey," said the former. "We have had no instructions on that point," said the latter,—"*on the contrary*, you told us yourself that your instructions were to announce an unconditional surrender." "That may be; but in so desperate a business as this, I do think we have a discretion to exercise on behalf of himself and family, which I must say, he seems quite incapable of exercising himself. Nay, upon my honour, I think we are bound not to forego the slightest opportunity of securing an advantage for our client."

His partners seemed struck with his observation; and Mr. Runnington, after a few moments' consideration, added the following postscript:—

"P.S.—As to the *mesne profits*, by the way, of course we anticipate no difficulty in effecting an amicable arrangement satisfactory to both parties, due consideration being had for the critical position in which our client finds himself so suddenly and unexpectedly placed. Indeed, it is not difficult to conceive that Mr. Aubrey, in taking the step in which we have above advised you, must have contemplated——" (here Mr. Runnington paused for a considerable time,) "being met in a similar frank, liberal, and equitable spirit."

It was agreed, at length, that the whole amount and effect of the above postscript ought to be regarded as a spontaneous suggestion of Messrs. Runnington's not in any way implicating, or calculated in any event to annoy, Mr. Aubrey; and a fair copy of the letter and postscript having been made, it was signed by the head of the firm, and forthwith despatched to Saffron Hill.

"Struck, by Jove, Gammon!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk; "as, with the above letter open in his hands he hurried, the instant that he had read it, into the room of his wily partner, and put the letter into his hands. Gammon read it with apparent calmness, but a slight flush overspread his cheek, and, as he finished the perusal, a subdued smile of excitement and triumph stole over his countenance.

"Lord, Gammon! isn't it glorious?" quoth Mr. Quirk heatedly, rubbing his hands together; "give us your hand, Gammon! We've fought a precious hard battle together"—and he shook his partner's hand with vehement cordi-

ality. "This fellow Aubrey is a trump—isn't he?—Egad, if I'd been in his shoes—one way or another, I'd have stuck at Yatton for a dozen years to come—ah, ha!" "Yes, I am sure you would if you had been able," replied Gammon drily, and with a smile. "Ay, that I would," replied Mr. Quirk, with a triumphant chuckle; "but now to come to business. By next quarter-day Titmouse will have £5,000 in hard cash,—half of it on the 17th of next month.—Lord! what have we done for him!" he added, with a sort of sigh. "We've put an ape into possession of Paradise—that's all"—said Gammon, absently and half aloud, and bitterly and contemptuously.

"By the way, Gammon, you see what's said about our bill—eh? The sooner it's made out the better, I should say—and—ahem! hem!—while Mr. Aubrey's on the tight rope he won't think of looking down at the particular items, will he? I should say, now's our time, and strike while the iron's hot! I've got *rather* a stiff entry, I can assure you. I must say, Snap's done his duty, and *I've* not had my eyes shut—ahem!" here Mr. Quirk winked very knowingly.

"You must not *over-do* it, Mr. Quirk—but all that I leave, as usual, to your admirable management as to that of a first-rate man of business. You know I'm a sad hand at accounts; but you and Snap are—you'll do all that should be done."

"Ay, ay—trust us!" interrupted Quirk quickly, with a significant nod, and fancying himself and Snap already at work, plundering the poor Aubreys. "And, by the way, Gammon, there are the mesne profits—that's a mighty fine postscript of theirs, isn't it?" and, replacing his spectacles, he read over the postscript aloud. "All my eye, of course!" he added as he laid down the letter,—“but I suppose one must give 'em a little time; it *is* a little hard on him just at present; but then, to be sure, that's *his* look-out—not ours or Titmouse's. Off hand, I should say we ought to be content with—say—twenty thousand down, and the rest in two years' time, so as to give him time to look about him a little —”

"That will be quite an after consideration," said Mr. Gammon, who, for the last few minutes, had appeared lost in thought. "Egad—an *after* consideration? Hang me if *I* think so, Gammon! There's a certain *bond*—eh? you recollect—" "I assure you, Mr. Quirk, that my eye is fixed quite as steadily and anxiously on that point as yours," said Gammon gravely.

"Thank you—thank you, Gammon!" replied Quirk with rather a relieved air; "it couldn't possibly be in better hands. Lud—to go wrong *there!* It would send me to my grave at a hand gallop—it would, so help me Heaven, Gammon! Titmouse is a queer hand to deal with—isn't he? Wasn't he strange and bumptious the other day? Egad, it made me quake! Need we tell him, just yet," he dropped his voice, "of the letter we've got? Couldn't we safely say only they have sent us word that we shall have Yatton by the 17th?" "Very great caution is necessary, Mr. Quirk, just now—" "You *don't* think the young scamp's going to turn round on us, and snap his fingers in our face, eh?" inquired Mr. Quirk apprehensively, violently twirling about his watch-key.

"If you leave him implicitly to me, you shall get all you want," replied Gammon, very gravely, and very pointedly. Quirk's colour changed a little, as he felt the keen grey eye of Gammon fixed upon him, and he involuntarily shrunk under it.

"You'll excuse me, Gammon," at length said he, with rather a disturbed air; "but there's no fathoming you, when you get into one of your mysterious humours; and you always look so particularly strange whenever we get on this subject! What can you know that I don't—or ought not?" "Nothing—nothing, I assure you," replied Gammon with a gay smile. "Well, I should have *thought* not. But coming back to the main point, if one could but *touch*

some part of that same ten thousand pounds, I *should* be a happy man! Consider, Gammon, what a draught there has been on my purse for the last sixteen months." "Well, can you doubt being soon richly repaid, my dear sir? Only don't be too hasty."

"I take it, Gammon, we've a lien on the rents now in the banker's hands, and to become due next quarter-day, and on the first instalment of the mesne profits, both for our bill of costs, and in respect of that same bond?"

"Mesne profits, Mr. Quirk?" echoed Gammon, rather quickly; "you seem to take it for granted that they are all ready to be paid over! Even supposing Titmouse not to grow restive, do you suppose it probable that Mr. Aubrey, after so vast and sudden a sacrifice, can have more than a very few thousands—probably hundreds—to keep him from immediate want, since we have reason to believe he has got no other resources than Yatton?"

"Not got 'em—not got 'em? D—n him! then he must look sharp and *get* 'em, that's all! You know we can't be trifled with; we must look after the interests of—Titmouse. And what's he to start with, if there's no mesne profits forthcoming? But, hang it! they must; I should say a gentle pressure, by and by, as soon as he's fairly out of Yatton, must produce money, or *security*—he must know quantities of people of rank and substance that would rush forward, if they once heard him squeal——"

"Ah, you're for putting the thumbscrew on at once—eh?" inquired Gammon with subdued energy, and a very strange sort of smile. "Ay—capital—that's *just* what I meant," quoth Quirk.

"Heartless old scoundrel!" thought Gammon, almost expressing as much; but his momentary excitement passed off unobserved by Mr. Quirk. "And, I must say, I agree with you," he added; "we ought in justice to see you first reimbursed your very heavy outlays, Mr. Quirk." "Well, that's honourable, Gammon. Oh, Gammon, how I *wish* you would let me make a friend of you!" suddenly added Mr. Quirk, eyeing wistfully his surprised companion.

"If you have one sincere, disinterested friend in the world, Mr. Quirk, he is to be found in Oily Gammon," said that gentleman, throwing great warmth into his manner, perceiving that Mr. Quirk was labouring with some communication of which he wished to deliver himself.

"Gammon, Gammon! how I *wish* I could think so!" replied Quirk, looking earnestly, yet half distrustingly, at Gammon, and fumbling about his hands in his pockets. The mild and friendly expression of Gammon's countenance, however, invited communicativeness; and after softly opening and shutting the two doors, to ascertain that no one was trying to overhear what might be passing, he returned to his chair, which he drew closer to Gammon, who noticed this air of preparation with not a little curiosity.

"I may be wrong, Gammon," commenced Mr. Quirk, in a low tone; "but I do believe you've always felt a kind of personal friendship towards me; and there ought to be no secrets among friends. *Friends*, indeed! Perhaps it's premature to mention so small a matter; but at a certain silversmith's, not a thousand miles from the Strand, there's at this moment in hand, as a present from me to you—" [Oh, dear, dear! Mr. Quirk! what a shocking untruth! and at your advanced period of life, too!]"—"as elegant a gold snuff-box as can be made, with a small inscription on the lid. I hope you won't value it the less for its being the gift of old Caleb Quirk——" he paused, and looked earnestly at Mr. Gammon.

"My dear Mr. Quirk, you have taken me," said he, apparently with great emotion, "quite by surprise. Value it? I will preserve it to the latest moment of my life, as a memorial of one whom the more I know of, the more I respect and admire!"

"You, Gammon, are in your prime—scarce even that—but I am growing old

—" tears appeared to glisten in the old gentleman's eyes; Gammon, much moved, shook him cordially by the hand in silence, wondering what upon earth was coming next. "Yes;—old Caleb Quirk's day is drawing to a close—I feel it, Gammon, I feel it! But I shall leave behind me—a—a—child—an only daughter, Gammon;" that gentleman gazed at the speaker with an expression of respectful sympathy;—"Dora! I don't think you can have known Dora so long, Gammon, without feeling a *little* interest in her!" Here Gammon's colour mounted rapidly, and he looked with feelings of a novel description at his senior partner. Could it be possible that old Quirk wished to bring about a match between his daughter and Gammon? His thoughts were for a moment confused. All he could do was to bow with an earnest—an anxious—a deprecating air; and Mr. Quirk, rather hurriedly, proceeded,—“and when I assure you, Gammon, that it is in your power to make an old friend and his only daughter happy and proud,”—Gammon began to draw very long breaths, and to look more and more apprehensively at his senior partner,—“in short, my dear friend Gammon, let me out with it at once—my daughter's in love with Titmouse.”

[“Whew!” thought Gammon, suddenly and infinitely relieved.]

“Ah, my dear Mr. Quirk, is that all?” he exclaimed, and shook Mr. Quirk cordially by the hand,—“at length you have made a friend of me indeed. But, to tell you the truth, I have long suspected as much; I have indeed!”

“Have you really? Well! there is no accounting for tastes, is there—especially among the women? Poor Dora's over head and ears—quite!—she is, so help me Heaven!” continued Quirk energetically.

“Well, my dear sir, and why this surprise?” said Gammon earnestly. “I consider Titmouse to be a very handsome young fellow; and that he is already rapidly acquiring very gentlemanly manners; and as to his *fortune*—really, it would be most desirable to bring it about. Indeed, the sooner his heart's fixed, and his word's pledged, the better—for you must of course be aware that there will be many schemers on the look-out to entrap his frank and inexperienced nature,—look, for instance, at Tag-rag.

“Eugh!” exclaimed Mr. Quirk, with a sudden motion of sickening disgust—“the old beast!—I smoked him long ago! Now, *that* I call villainy, Gammon infernal villainy! Don't you?”

“Indeed, indeed, Mr. Quirk, I do; I quite agree with you! Upon my honour, I think it is a part of even *my* duty towards our client, if possible, to protect him against such infamous designs.”

“Right—right, Gammon; by Jove, you're quite right—I *quite* agree with you!” replied Quirk earnestly, not observing the lambent smile upon the features of his calm, crafty, and sarcastic companion.

“You see,” said Gammon, “we've a very delicate and difficult game to play with old Tag-rag. He's certainly a toad, ugly and venomous—but then he's got a jewel in his head—he's got money, you know, and, to serve *our* purposes, we must really give him some hopes about his daughter and Titmouse.”

“Faugh! eugh! faugh! Nasty wretch! a little trollop! It makes one sick to hear of her! And, by the way, now we're on that subject, Gammon, what do we want of this wretch Tag-rag, now that Titmouse has actually got the property?” “Want of him? Money—security, my dear sir!—money!” “But, curse me! (excuse me, Gammon), why go to Tag-rag? *That's* what I can't understand! Surely anyone will advance almost any amount of money to Titmouse, with such security as he can give.” “Very possibly—probably—” “Possibly? Why, I myself don't mind advancing him five thousand—nay, ten thousand pounds—when we've once got hold of the title-deeds.”

“My dear sir,” interrupted Gammon calmly, but with a very serious air, and a slight change of colour which did not happen to attract the notice of his

eager companion, "there are reasons why I should dissuade you from doing so; upon my word, there are; further than that I do not think it necessary to go; but I have gone far enough, I know well, to do you a real service."

Mr. Quirk listened to all this with an air of the utmost amazement—even open-mouthed amazement. "What reason, Gammon, *can* there be against my advancing money on a security worth more than a hundred times the sum borrowed?" he inquired, with visible distrust, of his companion.

"I can but assure you, that were I called upon to say whether I would advance a serious sum of money to Titmouse, on the security of the Yatton estates, I should at all events require a most substantial *collateral* security."

"Mystery!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk, a sigh of vexation escaping him. "You'll excuse me Gammon, but you'd puzzle an angel, to say nothing of the devil! May I presume for one moment, so far on our personal and professional relationship, as to ask what the reason is on which your advice rests?"

"Mere caution—excessive caution—anxiety to place you out of the way of all risk. Surely, is your borrower so soon to be pronounced firm in the saddle?"

"If you know anything, Gammon, that I don't, it's your bounden duty to communicate it. *Look at our articles!*"

"It is; *but do I* know anything? Prove that, Mr. Quirk, and you need trouble yourself no more. But, in the mean while (without saying how much I feel hurt at your evident distrust), I have but a word or two further to add on this point."

When Mr. Gammon chose, he could assume an expression of feature, a tone of voice, and a manner which indicated to the person he was addressing, that he was announcing a matured opinion, an inflexible determination—and this, moreover, in the calmest, quietest way imaginable. Thus it was that he now said to Mr. Quirk, "My opinion is, that you should get *some third party* or parties to advance any required sum, and prevail upon Tag-rag to join in a collateral security, without—if possible—making him aware of the extent of liability he is incurring. By exciting him with the ridiculous notion of an attachment between his daughter and Titmouse, he may be induced to give his signature, as to some complimentary matter of form only.—Now, that's my opinion, Mr. Quirk; not lightly or hastily formed: and it rests upon a deep feeling of personal regard towards you, and also our common interests."

Mr. Quirk had listened to this communication in perturbed silence, eyeing the speaker with a ludicrous expression of mingled chagrin, apprehension, and bewilderment. "Gammon," at length said he, affecting a smile, "do you remember, when you, and I, and Dora, went to the play to see some German thing or other—Foss was the name, wasn't it?" "Faust—Faust," interrupted Gammon seriously. "Well; and now, what was the name of that fellow that was always—Meth—Meph—what was it?" "Mephistophiles," replied Gammon, unable to repress a smile. "Ah—yes! so it was. That's all; I only wanted to think of the name—I'd forgotten it. I beg your pardon, Gammon."

This was poor Mr. Quirk's way of being very sarcastic with his friend. He thought that he had now cut him to the very quick.

"If it hadn't been for what's passed between us to-day, Gammon, I should almost begin to think that you were not sincere in your friendship—" "Did I ever deceive you? Did I ever attempt to overreach you in anything, Mr. Quirk?" "N—o—o," replied Mr. Quirk—but not in the readiest manner, or most confident tone in the world,—"I certainly can't say I ever found you out—but I'll tell you what, we each keep a precious sharp look-out after each other, too—don't we?" he inquired, with a faint smile, which seemed for a moment reflected upon the face of Gammon.

"How long," said he, "I am to be the subject of such unkind suspicions, I

do not know; but your nature is suspicious; and as every one has his fault, that is the alloy in the otherwise pure gold of your manly, kind, and straightforward character. Time may show how you have wronged me. My anxious wish is, Mr. Quirk, to see your daughter occupy a position in which we may all be proud to see her."

Here a smile shot across Quirk's anxious countenance, like evening sunshine on troubled waters. "I do really believe, Gammon," said he eagerly, "that Dora's just the kind of girl to suit Titmouse——" "So indeed, my dear sir, do I. There's a mingled softness and spirit in Miss Quirk——" "She's a good girl, a good girl, Gammon! I hope he'll use her well if he gets her." His voice trembled. "She's got very much attached to him! Gad, she's quite altered lately; and my sister tells me that she's always playing dismal music when he's not there. But we can talk over these matters another time. Gad, Gammon, you can't think how it's relieved me, to open my mind to you on this matter! We quite understand one another now, Gammon—eh?"

"Quite," replied Gammon pointedly; and Mr. Quirk having quitted the room, the former prepared to answer Messrs. Runnington's letter. But first he leaned back, and reflected on several points of their late conversation. Of course he had resolved that Miss Quirk should never become Mrs. Titmouse. And what struck him as not a little singular was this; viz., that Mr. Quirk should have made no observation on the circumstance that Gammon allowed him to risk his daughter, and her all, upon chances which he pronounced too frail to warrant advancing a thousand or two of money! Yet so it was.

This was the answer he presently wrote to the letter of Messrs. Runnington:—

"Saffron Hill.

"GENTLEMEN—

"Doe, d. Titmouse v. Jolter.

"We are favoured with your letter of this day's date; and beg to assure you how very highly we appreciate the prompt and honourable course which has been taken by your client, under circumstances calculated to excite the greatest possible commiseration. Every expression of respectful sympathy, on our parts, and on that of our client, Mr. Titmouse, which you may think fit to convey to your distinguished client, is his. We shall be prepared to receive possession of the Yatton estates on the day you mention—namely, the 17th May next, on behalf of our client, Mr. Titmouse; on whose behalf, also, we beg to thank you for your communication concerning the last quarter's rents. With reference to the question of the mesne profits, we cannot doubt that your client will promptly pursue the same line of honourable conduct which he has hitherto adopted, and sincerely trust that a good understanding in this matter will speedily exist between our respective clients. As you have intimated a wish upon the subject, we beg to inform you that we have given instructions for making out and delivering our bill herein.

"We are, Gentlemen, your humble servants,

"QUIRK, GAMMON, & SNAP.

"Messrs. RUNNINGTON & Co."

Having finished writing the above letter, Gammon sat back in his chair, with folded arms, and entered upon a long train of thought—revolving many matters which were worthy of the profound consideration they then received.

When Gammon and Titmouse returned to town from York, they were fortunate in having the inside of the coach to themselves for nearly the whole of the way—an opportunity which Gammon improved to the utmost, by deepening the impression he had already made in the mind of Titmouse, of the truth of

one great fact—namely, that he and his fortunes would quickly part company, if Gammon should at any time so will—which never would, however, come to pass, so long as Titmouse recognized and deferred to the authority of Gammon in all things. In vain did Titmouse inquire how this could be. Gammon was impenetrable, mysterious, authoritative; and at length enjoined Titmouse to absolute secrecy concerning the existence of the fact in question, on pain of the infliction of those consequences to which I have already alluded.

Gammon assured him that there were many plans and plots hatching against him (Titmouse); but that it was in his (Gammon's) power to protect him from them all. Gammon particularly enjoined him, moreover, to consult the feelings, and attend to the suggestions of Mr. Quirk, wherein Mr. Gammon did not intimate to the contrary, and wound up all by telling him, that as he, Gammon, was the only person on earth—and this he really believed to be the case, as the reader may hereafter see—who knew the exact position of Titmouse, so he had devoted himself for his life to the advancing and securing the interests of Titmouse.

For about a fortnight after their return, Titmouse, at Gammon's instance, continued at his former lodgings; but at length complained so earnestly of their dismal quietude, and of their being out of the way of "*life*," that Gammon yielded to his wishes, and, together with Mr. Quirk, consented to his removing to a central spot—in fact, to the Cabbage-stalk Hotel, Covent Garden—a queer enough name, to be sure; but it was the family name of a great wholesale greengrocer, who owned most of the property thereabouts. It was not without considerable uneasiness and anxiety that Messrs. Quirk and Snap beheld this change effected, apprehensive that it might have the effect of estranging Titmouse from them; but since Gammon assented to it, they had nothing for it but to acquiesce, considering Titmouse's proximity to his splendid independence. They resolved, however, as far as in each of them lay, not to let themselves be forgotten by Titmouse. Pending the rule for the new trial, Mr. Quirk was so confident concerning the issue, that he greatly increased the allowance of Titmouse; to an extent, indeed, which admitted of his entering into almost all the gaieties that his as yet scarce initiated heart could desire. In the first place, he constantly added to his wardrobe. Then he took lessons, every other day, in "the noble art of self-defence;" which gave him an opportunity of forming with great ease, at once an extensive and brilliant circle of acquaintance. Fencing-rooms, wrestling-rooms, shooting-galleries, places for pigeon-shooting, cock-fighting, dog-fighting, and billiard-rooms; the water and boat-racing—these were the dazzling scenes which occupied the chief portion of each day. Then, in the evening, there were theatres, great and small, the various taverns, and other places of nocturnal resort, which are the secret pride and glory of the metropolis. In addition to this, at an advanced period of the night, or rather a very early hour in the morning, he sedulously strove to perfect himself in those higher arts and accomplishments, excelled in by one or two of the more eminent of the youthful aristocracy, viz., breaking windows, pulling bells, wrenching off knockers, extinguishing lamps, tripping up old women, watchmen, and children, and spoiling their clothes;—ah, how often, in his humbler days, had his heart panted in noble rivalry of such feats as these, and emulation of the notoriety they earned for the glittering miscreants who excelled in them! Ah, Titmouse, Titmouse! Now is your time! *Macte, novâ virtute, puer!*

That he could long frequent such scenes as these without forming an extensive and varied acquaintance, would be a very unlikely thing to suppose; and there was one who would fain have joined him in his new adventures—one who, as I have already intimated, had initiated him into the scenes with which he was now becoming so familiar; I mean Snap, who had been at once

his "guide, philosopher, and friend;" but who now had fewer and fewer opportunities of associating with him, inasmuch as his (Snap's) nose was continually "kept at the grindstone" in Saffron Hill, to compensate for the lack of attention to the business of the office of his senior partners, owing to their incessant occupation with the affairs of Titmouse. Still, however, he now and then contrived to remind Titmouse of his (Snap's) existence, by sending him intimations of interesting trials at the Old Bailey and elsewhere, and securing him a good seat to view both the criminal and the spectators—often persons of the greatest rank, fashion, and beauty; for so it happens that in this country, the more hideous the crime, the more intense the curiosity of the upper classes of both sexes to witness the miscreant perpetrator; the more disgusting the details, the greater the avidity with which they are listened to by the distinguished auditors;—the reason being plain, that, as they have exhausted the pleasures and excitements afforded by their own sphere, their palled and sated appetites require novel and more powerful stimulants. Hence, at length, we see "fashionables" peopling even the condemned cell—rushing, in excited groups, after the shuddering malefactor, staggering, half palsied, and with horror-laden eye, on his way to the gallows! As soon as old Quirk had obtained an inkling of Titmouse's tastes in these matters, he afforded Titmouse many opportunities of gratifying it. Once or twice the old gentleman succeeded even in enabling Titmouse (severe trial, however, for his exquisite sensibilities!) to shake the cold and pinioned hands of wretches within a few minutes' time of being led out for execution!

But let us not lose sight of our early and interesting friends, the Tag-rags—a thing which both Quirk and Gammon resolved should not happen to Titmouse: for, on the very first Sunday after his arrival in town from York, a handsome glass coach might have been seen, about two o'clock in the afternoon, drawing up opposite the gates of Satin Lodge! from which said coach, the door having been opened, presently descended Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Titmouse. Now, the Tag-rags always dined at about two o'clock on Sundays; and on the present occasion, Mr., Mrs., and Miss Tag-rag, together with a pretty constant visitor, the Reverend Dismal Horror, were sitting at their dinner-table discussing as nice a savoury leg of roast pork, with applesauce, as could at once have tempted and satisfied the most fastidious and the most indiscriminating appetite.

"Oh, ma!" exclaimed Miss Tag-rag faintly, changing colour as she caught sight, through the blinds, of the approaching visitors—"if there isn't Mr. Titmouse!" and almost dropping on the table her plate, in which, with an air of tender gallantry, Mr. Horror was in the act of depositing some greens, she flew out of the room, darted upstairs, and in a trice was standing with beating heart before her glass, hastily twirling her ringlets round her trembling fingers, and making one or two slight alterations in her dress. Her papa and mamma started up at the same moment hastily wiping their mouths on the corners of the table-cloth; and, after a hurried apology to their reverend guest, whom they begged "to go on eating till they came back"—they bounced into the drawing-room, just time enough to appear as if they had been seated for some time; but they were both rather red in the face and flustered in their manner. Yet, how abortive was their attempt to disguise the disgraceful fact of their having been at dinner when their distinguished visitors arrived! For, firstly, the house was redolent of the odours of roast pork, sage and onion-stuffing, and greens; secondly, the red-faced servant girl was peering round the corner of the kitchen stairs, as if watching an opportunity to whip off a small dinner tray that stood between the dining-room and drawing-room; and thirdly, they caught a glimpse of the countenance of the reverend young guest, who was holding open the dining-room door just wide enough to enable him to see

who passed on to the drawing-room ; for, in truth, the name which had escaped from the lips of Miss Tag-rag, was one that always excited unpleasant feelings in the breast of her spiritual friend.

"Ah! Mr. and Mrs. Tag-rag! 'Pon my soul—glad to see you—and—hope you're all well?" commenced Titmouse, with an air of easy confidence and grace. Mr. Gammon calmly introduced himself and Mr. Quirk.

"We were just going to sit down to—*lunch*," said Mr. Tag-rag hurriedly. "You won't take a little, will you, gentlemen?" inquired Mrs. Tag-rag faintly ; and both the worthy couple felt infinite relief on being assured that their distinguished visitors had already lunched. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Tag-rag could take their eyes off Mr. Titmouse, whose easy nonchalance convinced them that he must have been keeping the society of lords. He was just inquiring—as he ran his hand through his hair, and gently smacked his slight ebony cane against his leg—after Miss Tag-rag, when, pale and agitated, and holding in her hand a pocket-handkerchief, which she had first suffused with musk and bergamot, designed to overcome so much of the vulgar odour of dinner as might be lingering about *her*—that interesting young lady entered. Titmouse rose and received her in a familiar, forward manner, she turning white and red by turns. She looked such a shrivelled little ugly formal creature, that Titmouse conceived quite a hatred of her, though recollecting that he had once thought such an inferior piece of goods superfine. Old Quirk and Tag-rag, every now and then, cast distrustful glances at each other ; but Gammon kept all in a calm flow of small talk, which at length restored those whom they had come to see, to something like self-possession. As for Mr. Quirk the more he looked at Miss Tag-rag, the more pride and satisfaction he felt in reflecting upon the unfavourable contrast, she must present, in Titmouse's eyes, to Miss Quirk. After a little further conversation, principally concerning the brilliant success of Titmouse, Mr. Quirk came to the business of the day, and invited Mr., Mrs., and Miss Tag-rag, to dinner at Alibi House, on the ensuing Sunday, at six o'clock—apologizing for the absence of Miss Quirk, on the score of indisposition—she being at the time in the highest possible state of health. Mrs. Tag-rag was on the point of saying something deprecatory of their dining out on Sunday, as contrary to their rule ; but a sudden recollection of the earthly interests she might peril by so doing, aided by a fearfully significant glance from Mr. Tag-rag, restrained her. The invitation was, therefore, accepted in a very obsequious manner ; and soon afterwards as their great visitor took their departure, leaving Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Tag-rag in a state of considerable excitement. Goodness ! could there be a doubt that there must be some very potent attraction at Satin Lodge to bring thither Titmouse, after all that had occurred ? And where could reside the point of that attraction but in Miss Tag-rag ?

As soon as their visitors' glass-coach had driven off—its inmates laughing heartily at the people they had just quitted—Mr., Mrs., and Miss Tag-rag returned to the dining-table, like suddenly disturbed fowl returning to their roost, when the disturbance has ceased. Profuse were their apologies to Mr. Horror : not aware, however, that he had improved the opportunity afforded by their absence, to recruit his exhausted energies with a couple of glasses of port wine from a decanter which stood on the sideboard—a circumstance which he did not deem important enough to mention. Vehemently suspecting as he did, what was the state of things with reference to Mr. Titmouse and Miss Tag-rag, it was somewhat of a trial of temper to the exemplary young pastor, to have to listen, for the remainder of the afternoon, to the praises of Titmouse, and speculations concerning the immensity of his fortune—matters, indeed (in his pious estimation), *of the earth, earthly*. In vain did the worthy minister strive, every now and then, to divert the current of conversation into

a more profitable channel—*i.e.*, towards himself; all he said was evidently lost upon her for whose ear it was intended. She was in a reverie, and often sighed. The principal figures before her mind's eye were Tittlebat Titmouse, Esquire, and the Rev. Dismal Horror. The latter was about twenty-six (he had been called to the work of the ministry in his sixteenth year); short; his face slightly pitted with small-pox; his forehead narrow; his eyes cold and watery; no eyebrows or whiskers; high cheek-bones; his short dark hair combed primly forward over each temple, and twisted into a sort of topknot in front; he wore no shirt-collars, but had a white neckhandkerchief tied very formally, and was dressed in an ill-made suit of black. He spoke in a drawing canting tone; and his countenance was overspread with a demure expression of—*cunning, trying to look religious*. Then he was always talking about himself, and the devil, and his chapel, and the bottomless pit, and the number of souls which he had saved, and the number of those whom he knew were damned, and many more who certainly would be damned; and other matters of that sort, intrusted—it would seem—to his confidential keeping. All this might be very well in its way, began to think Miss Tag-rag—but it was possible to choke a dog with pudding. Poor girl, can you wonder at her dwelling fondly upon the image of Titmouse? So splendidly dressed—so handsome—such a fashionable air—and with—ten thousand-a-year! When she put all these things together it almost looked like a dream; such good fortune could never be in store for a poor simple girl like herself. Yet there was such a thing as—love at first sight! After tea they all walked down to Mr. Horror's meeting-house. It was very crowded; and it was remarked that the eloquent young preacher had never delivered a more impassioned sermon from the pulpit: it was sublime. Oh, how bitterly he denounced “worldly-mindedness!” What a vivid picture he drew of the flourishing green bay-tree of the wicked, suddenly blasted in the moment of its pride and strength; while he righteous should shine like stars in the firmament for ever and ever! Who cannot see here shadowed out the characters of Titmouse and of Horror respectively?—who hesitate between the two? And when at length the sermon over, he sat down in his pulpit (the congregation also sitting and singing, which had a somewhat queer effect), and drew gracefully across his damp forehead his white pocket-handkerchief, which had been given him by Miss Tag-rag; and looked with an air of most interesting languor and exhaustion towards Mr. Tag-rag's pew, where sat that young lamb of his flock—Miss Tag-rag—her father the wealthiest man in the congregation, and she his only child—he felt a most lively and tender interest in her welfare—her spiritual welfare, and resolved to call the next morning; entertaining an humble hope of finding that his zealous labours had not been in vain! Was one fruit of them to have been looked for in the benignant temper which Tag-rag, to the amazement of his shopmen, evinced the next morning for at least an hour? Would that the like good effects had been visible in Mrs. and Miss Tag-rag; but—alas that I should have to record it!—it was so far otherwise, that they laid aside some fancy-fair work on which Mr. Horror had set them—for the whole week, which they devoted to the preparation of those dresses with which they purposed the profanation of the ensuing Sunday.

That day at length arrived, and precisely at six o'clock a genteel fly deposited the visitants from Satin Lodge at the splendid entrance to Alibi House. There was the big footman—shoulder-knot, red-breeches, and all. Tag-rag felt a *little* nervous. Before they had entered the gates, the fond proud parents had kissed their trembling daughter, and entreated her “to keep her spirits up!” The exhortation was needful; for when she saw the sort of style that awaited them, she became not a little agitated. When she entered the hall—ah! on a chair lay a glossy new hat, and a delicate ebony walking-

stick; so he had come—was then upstairs!—Miss Tag-rag trembled in every limb.

"I don't know, my dear," whispered Mrs. Tag-rag to her husband, with a subdued sigh, as they followed the splendid footman up-stairs,—*"It may be all uncommon grand; but somehow I'm afraid we're doing wrong—it's the Lord's Day—see if any good comes of it."* *"Tut—hold your tongue! Let's have no nonsense,"* sternly whispered Mr. Tag-rag to his submissive wife.

"Your name, sir?" quoth the footman, in a gentlemanly way. *"Mr., Mrs., and Miss Tag-rag,"* replied Mr. Tag-rag, after clearing his throat; and so they were announced, Miss Quirk coming forward to receive the ladies with the most charming affability. There stood Titmouse, in an easy attitude, with his hands stuck into his coat pockets, and resting on his hips, in a very delicate and elegant fashion. How perfectly he seemed at his ease! *"Oh Lord!"* thought Tag-rag, *"that's the young fellow I used to go on so to!"*

In due time dinner was announced; and who can describe the rapture that thrilled through the bosoms of the three Tag-rags, when Mr. Quirk requested Mr. Titmouse to take down—Miss Tag-rag!! Her father took down Mrs. Alias; Mr. Quirk, Mrs. Tag-rag; and Gammon, Miss Quirk. She really might have been proud of her partner. Gammon was about thirty-six years old; above the average height; with a particularly gentlemanly appearance and address, and an intellectual and even handsome countenance, though occasionally he wore, to a keen observer, a sinister expression. He wore a blue coat, a plain white waistcoat (not disfigured by any glistening fiddle-faddle of pins, chains, or quizzing-glasses), black trousers, and silk stockings. There was at once an appearance of neatness and carelessness; and there was such a ready smile—such a bland ease and self-possession—as communicated itself to those whom he addressed. Dinner went off very pleasantly, the wines soon communicating a little confidence to the flustered guests. Mrs. Tag-rag had drunk so much champagne—an unusual beverage for her—that almost as soon as she returned to the drawing-room, she sat down on the sofa and fell asleep, leaving the two young ladies to amuse each other as best they might; for Mrs. Alias was very deaf, and moreover very stiff and distant, and sat looking at them in silence. To return to the dining-room for a moment. *"Twas quite delightful to see the sort of friendship that seemed to grow up between Quirk and Tag-rag, as their heads got filled with wine: at the same time each of them drawing closer and closer to Titmouse, who sat between them—volubility itself. They soon dropped all disguise—each plainly under the impression that the other could not, or did not, observe him; and at length, impelled by their overmastering motives, they became so bare-faced in their sycophancy—evidently forgetting that Gammon was present—that he could several times, with only the utmost difficulty, refrain from bursting into laughter at the earnest devotion with which these two worshippers of the little golden calf strove to attract the attention of their divinity, and recommend themselves to its favour.*

At length the four gentlemen repaired to the drawing-room, whence issued the sounds of music; and on entering they beheld the two lovely performers seated at the piano, engaged upon a duet. The plump flaxen-haired Miss Quirk, in her flowing white muslin dress, her thick gold chain and massive bracelets, formed rather a strong contrast to her sallow skinny little companion, in a span-new slate-coloured silk dress, with staring scarlet sash; her long corkscrew ringlets glistening in bear's grease: and as for their performance, Miss Quirk played boldly and well through her part, a smile of contempt now and then beaming over her countenance at the ridiculous incapacity of her companion. As soon as the gentlemen made their appearance the ladies ceased, and withdrew from the piano. Miss Tag-rag, with a sweet air of sim-

plicity and conscious embarrassment, gliding towards the sofa, where sat her mamma asleep, but whom she at once awoke. Mr. Quirk exclaimed, as, evidently elevated with wine, he slapped his daughter on her fat back, "Ah, Dora, my love!" while Tag-rag kissed his daughter's cheek, and squeezed her hand, and then glanced with a proud and delighted air at Titmouse, who was lolling at full length upon the other sofa, picking his teeth. While Miss Quirk was making tea, Gammon gaily conversing with her, and in an undertone satirizing Miss Tag-rag; the latter young lady was gazing, with a timid air, at the various elegant knick-knacks scattered upon the tables and slabs. One of these consisted of a pretty little box, about a foot square, with a glass lid, through which she saw the contents; and they not a little surprised her. They were pieces of cord; and on looking at one of the sides of the box, she read, with a sudden shudder,—"*With these cords were tied the hands of Arthur Grizzlegut, executed for high treason, 1st May, 18—*. Presented, as a mark of respect, to Caleb Quirk, Esq., by John Ketch." Poor Miss Tag-rag recoiled from the box as if she had seen it filled with writhing adders. She took an early opportunity, however, of calling her father's attention to it; and he pronounced it a "most interesting object," and fetched Mrs. Tag-rag to see it. She agreed first with her daughter and then with her husband. Quietly pushing her investigations, Miss Tag-rag by-and-by beheld a large and splendidly bound volume—in fact, Miss Quirk's album; and, after turning over most of the leaves, and glancing over the "poetical effusions" and "prose sentiments" which few fools can abstain from depositing upon the embossed pages, when solicited by the lovely proprietresses of such works, behold—her heart fluttered—poor Miss Tag-rag almost dropped the magnificent volume; for there was the idolized name of Mr. Titmouse—no doubt his own handwriting and composition. She read it over eagerly again and again,—

"Tittebat Titmouse Is My name,
England Is My Nation,
London Is My dwelling-Place,
And Christ Is My Salvation."

It was very—very beautiful—beautiful in its simplicity! She looked anxiously about for writing implements! but not seeing any, was at length obliged to trust to her memory; on which, indeed, the exquisite composition was already inscribed in indelible characters. Miss Quirk, who was watching her motions, guessed the true cause of her excitement; and a smile of mingled scorn and pity for her infatuated delusion shone upon her face: in which, however, there appeared a little anxiety when she beheld Titmouse—not, however, perceiving that he did so in consequence of a motion from Gammon, whose eye governed his movements as a man's those of his spaniel—walk up to her, and converse with a great appearance of interest.

At length Mr. Tag-rag's "carriage" was announced. Mr. Quirk gave his arm to Mrs. Tag-rag, and Mr. Titmouse to the daughter; who endeavoured, as she went down the stairs, to direct melting glances at her handsome and distinguished companion. They evidently *told*, for she could not be mistaken; he certainly once or twice squeezed her arm—and the last fond words he uttered to her were "Pon my soul—it's early: devilish sorry you're going!" As the Tag-rags drove home, they were all loud in the praises of those whom they had just quitted, particularly of those whose splendid hospitality they had been enjoying. With a daughter, with whom Mr. Quirk must naturally have wished to make so splendid a match as that with Titmouse—but who was plainly engaged to Mr. Gammon—how kind and disinterested was Mr. Quirk, in affording every encouragement in his power to the passion which Titmouse had so manifestly conceived for Miss Tag-rag! And was there ever so delightful a

person as Gammon? How cordially he had shaken the hands of each of them at parting! As for Miss Tag-rag, she almost felt that, if her heart had not been so deeply engaged to Titmouse, she could have loved Mr. Gammon!

"I hope, Tabby," said Mrs. Tag-rag, "that when you're Mrs. Titmouse, you'll bring your dear husband to hear Mr. Horror? You know, we ought to be grateful to the Lord—for He has done it."

"La, ma, how can I tell?" quoth Miss Tag-rag petulantly. "I must go where Mr. Titmouse chooses, of course; and no doubt he'll take sittings in one of the West End churches: you know, *you* go where *pa* goes—I go where Titmouse goes! But I *will* come sometimes, too—if it's only to show that I'm not above it, you know. La, what a stir there will be! The three Miss Knipps—I do so hope they'll be there! I'll have your pew, ma, lined with red velvet; it will look so genteel."

"I'm not quite so sure, Tabby, though," interrupted her father with a certain swell of manner, "that we shall, after a certain event, continue to live in these parts. There's such a thing as retiring from business, Tabby; besides, we shall nat'rally wish to be near you."

"He's a *love* of a man, *pa*, isn't he?" interrupted Miss Tag-rag with irrepressible excitement. Her father folded her in his arms. They could hardly believe that they had reached Satin Lodge. That respectable structure, somehow or other, now looked to the eyes of all of them shrunk into most contemptible dimensions. What was it to the spacious and splendid residence which they had quitted? And what, in all probability, could that be to the mansion—or perhaps several mansions—to which Mr. Titmouse would be presently entitled, and—in his right—some one else?

CHAPTER XVII.

WHILST the brilliant success of Tittlebat Titmouse was exciting so great a sensation amongst the inmates of Satin Lodge and Alibi House, there were also certain quarters in the upper regions of society, in which it produced a considerable commotion, and where it was contemplated with feelings of intense interest; nor without reason. For indeed to you, reflective reader, much pondering men and manners, and observing the influence of great wealth, especially suddenly and unexpectedly acquired, upon all classes of mankind—it would appear passing strange that so prodigious an event as that of an accession to a fortune of ten thousand a-year, and a large accumulation of money besides, could be looked on with indifference in those regions where MONEY "Is like the air they breathe—if they have it not they die;" in whose absence, all their "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends," disappear like snow under sunshine; the edifice of pomp, luxury, and magnificence that rose like an exhalation, so disappears—"And, like an unsubstantial pageant faded, leaves not a rack behind."

If the reader had reverently cast his eye over the pages of that glittering centre of aristocratic literature, and inexhaustible solace against the *ennui* of a wet day—I mean *Debrett's Peerage*, his attention could not have failed to be riveted, amongst a galaxy of brilliant but minor stars, by the radiance of one transcendent constellation. Behold; hush; tremble!

"AUGUSTUS MORTIMER PLANTAGENET FITZ-URSE, EARL OF DREDDLINGTON, VISCOUNT FITZ-URSE, AND BARON DRELINCOURT; KNIGHT OF THE GOLDEN FLEECE; G.C.B., D.C.L., F.C.S., F.P.S., etc., etc.; Lieutenant-General in the army, Colonel of the 37th regiment of light dragoons; Lord Lieutenant of —shire; elder brother of the Trinity House; formerly Lord Steward of the Household; born the 31st of March, 17—; succeeded his father, PERCY

CONSTANTINE FITZ-URSE, as fifth Earl, and twentieth in the Barony, January 10th, 17—; married, April 1, 17—, the Right Hon. Lady Philippa Emmeline Blanche Macspleuchan, daughter of Archibald, ninth Duke of Tantalton, K.T., and has issue an only child,

“CECILIA PHILIPPA LEOPOLDINA PLANTAGENET, born June 10, 17—.

“Town residence, Grosvenor Square.

“Seats, Gruneaghoolaghan Castle, Galway; Tre-ardevoraveor Manor, Cornwall; Llmryllwcrwpplgilly Abbey, N. Wales; Tullyclachanach Palace, N. Britain; Poppleton Hall, Hertfordshire.

“Earldom, by patent, 1667;—Barony, by writ of summons, 12th Hen. II.”

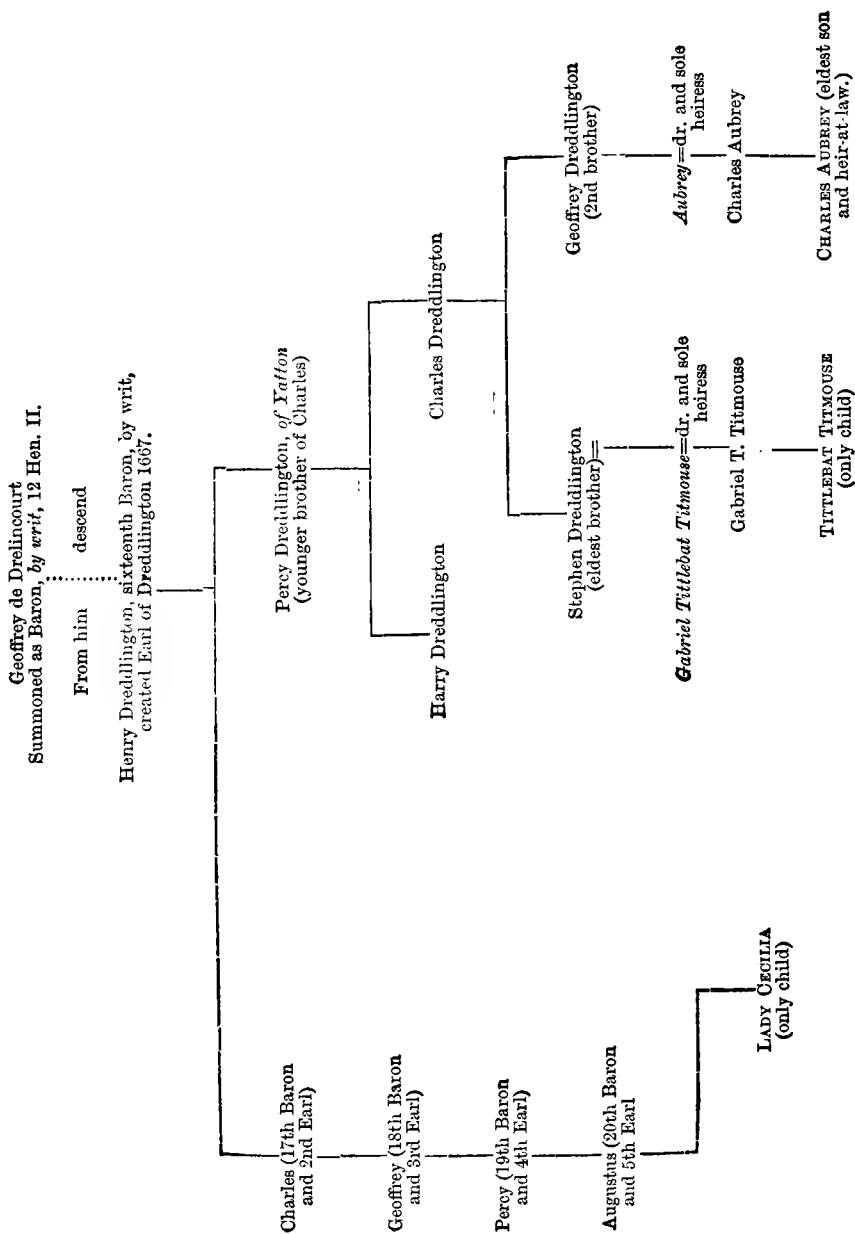
Now, as to the above tremendous list of seats and residences, be it observed that the existence of two of them, viz., Grosvenor Square and Poppleton Hall, was tolerably well ascertained by the residence of the august proprietor of them, and the expenditure therein of his princely revenue of £5,000 a year. The existence of the remaining ones, however, the names of which the diligent chronicler has preserved with such scrupulous accuracy, had become somewhat problematical since the era of the civil wars, and the physical derangement of the surface of the earth in those parts, which one may conceive to have taken place consequent upon those events; those imposing feudal residences having been originally erected in positions so carefully selected with a view to their security against aggression, as to have become totally inaccessible—and indeed unknown, to the present inglorious and degenerate race, no longer animated by the spirit of chivalry and adventure.

[I have now recovered my breath, after my bold flight into the resplendent regions of aristocracy; but my eyes are still dazzled.]

The reader may by this time have got an intimation that Tittlebat Titmouse, in a madder freak of fortune than any which her incomprehensible ladyship hath hitherto exhibited in the pages of this history, is far on his way towards a dizzy pitch of greatness—viz., that he has now, owing to the verdict of the Yorkshire jury, taken the place of Mr. Aubrey, and become heir-expectant to the oldest barony in the kingdom—between it and him only one old peer, and his sole child, an unmarried daughter, intervening. Behold the thing demonstrated to your very eye, in the Pedigree on page 252, which is only our former one a little extended.

From this I think it will appear, that on the death of Augustus fifth earl and twentieth baron, with no other issue than Lady Cecilia, the earldom being then extinct, the barony would descend upon the Lady Cecilia; and that, in the event of her dying without issue in the lifetime of her father, Tittlebat Titmouse would on the earl's death without other lawful issue become Lord Drelincourt, twenty-first in the barony; and in the event of her dying without issue, after her father's death, Tittlebat Titmouse would become the twenty-second Lord Drelincourt; one or other of which two splendid positions, but for the enterprising agency of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, would have been occupied by Charles Aubrey, Esq.

At the time of which I am writing, the Earl of Dreddlington was about sixty-seven years old; and he would have realised the idea of an incarnation of the sublimest pride. He was of rather a slight make, and, though of a tolerably advanced age, stood as straight as an arrow. His hair was glossy, and white as snow: his features were of an aristocratic cast; their expression was severe and haughty; and I am compelled to say that there was scarce a trace of intellect perceptible in them. His manner and demeanour were cold, imperturbable, inaccessible; wherever he went—so to speak—he radiated cold. Comparative poverty embittered his spirit, as his lofty birth and ancient descent generated the pride I have spoken of. With what calm and supreme self-satisfaction did he look down upon all lower in the peerage than himself?



and as for a newly-created peer, he looked at such a being with ineffable disdain. Amongst his few equals he was affable enough; amongst his inferiors he exhibited an insupportable appearance of condescension—one which excited a wise man's smile of pity and contempt, and a fool's anger—both, however, equally naught to the Earl of Dreddlington. If any one could have ventured upon a *post-mortem* examination of so august a structure as the Earl's carcase, his heart would probably have been found to be of the size of a pea, and his brain very soft and flabby; both, however, equal to the small occasions which, from time to time, called for the exercise of their functions. The former was occupied almost exclusively by two feelings—love of himself and of his daughter (because upon her would descend his barony); the latter exhibited its powers (supposing the brain to be the seat of the mind) in mastering the military details requisite for nominal soldiership; the game of whist; the routine of petty business in the House of Lords; and the etiquette of the court. One branch of useful knowledge by the way he had, however, completely mastered—that which is so ably condensed in *Debrett*; and he became a sort of oracle in such matters. As for his politics, he professed Whig principles—and was indeed, a bitter, though quiet partisan. In attendance to his senatorial duties, he practised an exemplary punctuality; was always to be found in the House at its sitting and rising; and never once, on any occasion, great or small, voted against his party. He had never been heard to speak in a full House; first, because he never could muster nerve enough for the purpose; secondly, because he never had anything to say; and lastly, lest he should compromise his dignity, and destroy the *prestige* of his position, by not speaking better than any one present. His services were not, however, entirely over-looked; for, on his party coming into office for a few weeks (they knew it could be for no longer a time) they made him Lord Steward of the Household; which was thenceforward an epoch to which he referred every event of his life, great and small. The great object of his ambition, ever since he had been of an age to form large and comprehensive views of action and conduct, to conceive superior designs, and to achieve distinction amongst mankind—was, to obtain a step in the peerage; for considering the antiquity of his family, and his ample, nay *superfluous* pecuniary means—so much more than adequate to support his present double dignity of earl and baron—he thought it but a reasonable return for his eminent political services to the step which he coveted. But his anxiety on this point had been recently increased a thousand-fold by one circumstance. A gentleman who held an honourable and lucrative official situation in the House, and who never had treated the Earl of Dreddlington with that profound obsequiousness which the Earl conceived to be his due—but, on the contrary, had presumed to consider himself a man and an Englishman equally with the Earl—had, a short time before, succeeded in establishing his title to an earldom that had long been dormant, and was of creation earlier than that of Dreddlington. The Earl of Dreddlington took this untoward circumstance so much to heart, that for some months afterwards he appeared to be in a decline; always experiencing a dreadful inward spasm whenever the Earl of Fitzwalter made his appearance in the House. For this sad state of things there was plainly but one remedy—a Marquisate—at which the Earl gazed with the wistful eye of an old and feeble ape at a cocoa-nut, just above his reach, and which he beholds at length grasped and carried off by some nimbler and younger rival.

Amongst all the weighty cares and anxieties of this life, I must do the Earl the justice to say, that he did not neglect the concerns of hereafter—the solemn realities of that future revealed to us in the Scriptures. To his enlightened and comprehensive view of the state of things around him, it was evident that the Author of the world had decreed the existence of regular

gradations of society. The following lines, quoted one night in the House by the leader of his party, had infinitely delighted the Earl—

“Oh, where *Degree* is shaken,
Which is the ladder to all high designs,
The enterprise is sick !
Take but *Degree* away—untune that string,
And, hark ! what discord follows ! each thing meets,
In mere oppugnancy !” *

When the Earl discovered that this was the production of Shakspeare, he conceived a great respect for that writer, and purchased a copy of his works, and had them splendidly bound—never to be opened, however, except at that one place where the famous passage in question was to be found. How great was the honour thus conferred upon the plebeian poet to stand amidst a collection of royal and noble authors, to whose productions, and those in elucidation and praise of them, the Earl's splendid-looking library had till then been confined ! Since, thought the Earl, such is clearly the order of Providence in this world, why should it not be so in the next ? He felt certain that then there would be found corresponding differences and degrees, in analogy to the differences and degrees existing upon earth ; and with this view had read and endeavoured to comprehend a very dry but learned book—Butler's *Analogy*—lent him by a deceased kinsman—a bishop. This consolatory conclusion of the Earl's was greatly strengthened by a passage of Scripture, from which he had once heard the aforesaid bishop preach—“*In my Father's house are MANY MANSIONS ; if it had not been so, I would have told you.*” On grounds such as these, after much conversation with several old brother peers of his own rank, he and they—those wise and good men—came to the conclusion that there was no real ground for apprehending so grievous a misfortune as the huddling together hereafter of the great and small into one miscellaneous and ill-assorted assemblage ; but that the rules of precedence, in all their strictness, as being founded in the nature of things, would meet with an exact observance, so that every one should be ultimately and eternally happy in the company of his equals. The Earl of Dreddlington would have, in fact, as soon supposed, with the deluded Indian, that in his voyage to the next world—“His faithful dog shall bear him company ;” as that his lordship should be doomed to participate the same regions of heaven with any of his domestics : unless, indeed, by some, in his view, not improbable dispensation, there to perform those offices—or analogous ones—for their old masters, which they had performed upon earth. As the Earl grew older, these just, and rational, and Scriptural views, became clearer, and his faith firmer. Indeed, it might be said that he was in a manner ripening for immortality—for which his noble and lofty nature, he felt, was fitter, and more likely to be in its element, than it could possibly be in this dull, degraded, and confused world. He knew that there his sufferings in this inferior stage of existence would be richly recompensed ; for sufferings indeed he had, though secret, arising from the scanty means which had been allotted to him for the purpose of maintaining the exalted rank to which it had pleased God to call him. The long series of exquisite mortifications and pinching privations arising from this inadequacy of means, had, however, the Earl doubted not, been designed by Providence as a trial of his constancy, and from which he would, in due time, issue like thrice-refined gold. Then also would doubtless be remembered in his favour the innumerable instances of his condescension, in mingling in the

* *Troilus and Cressida*, I. iii.

most open manner with those who were unquestionably his inferiors, sacrificing his own feelings of lofty and fastidious exclusiveness, and endeavouring to advance the interests, and, as far as influence and example went, polish and refine the manners of the lower orders of society. Such is an outline—alas, how faint and imperfect!—of the character of this great and good man, the Earl of Dreddlington.

As for his domestic and family circumstances, he had been a widower for some fifteen years, his countess having brought him but one child, Lady Cecilia Philippa Leopoldina Plantagenet, who was in almost all respects, the counterpart of her illustrious father. She resembled him not a little in feature, only that she partook of the plainness of her mother. Her complexion was delicately fair; but her features had no other expression than that of a languid hauteur. Her upper eyelids drooped as if she could hardly keep them open; the upper jaw projected considerably over the under one; and her front teeth were prominent and exposed. Frigid and inanimate, she seemed to take but little interest in anything on earth. In person, she was of average height, of slender and well-proportioned figure, and an erect and graceful carriage, only that she had a habit of throwing her head a little backward, that gave her a singularly disdainful appearance. She had reached her twenty-seventh year without having had an eligible offer of marriage, though she would be the possessor of a barony in her own right, and £5,000 a-year; a circumstance which, it may be believed, not a little embittered her. She inherited her father's pride in all its plenitude.

Ever since the first Earl of Dreddlington had, through a bitter pique conceived against his eldest son, the second earl, diverted the principal family revenues to the younger branch, leaving the title to be supported by only £5,000 a-year, there had been a complete estrangement between the elder and the younger—the titled and the monied—branches of the family. On Mr. Aubrey's attaining his majority, however, the present earl sanctioned overtures being made towards a reconciliation, being of opinion that Mr. Aubrey and Lady Cecilia might, by intermarriage, effect a happy re-union of family interests; an object, this, that had long lain nearer his heart than any other upon earth, till, in fact, it became a kind of passion. Actuated by such considerations, he had done more to conciliate Mr. Aubrey than he had ever done towards any one on earth. It was, however, in vain. Mr. Aubrey's first delinquency was an unqualified and enthusiastic adoption of Tory principles. Now, all the Dreddlingtons, from time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, had been firm unflinching Tories, till the distinguished father of the present Earl quietly walked over one day to the other side of the House of Lords, completely fascinated by a bit of riband which the minister held up before him: and before he had sat in that wonder-working region, the ministerial side of the House, twenty-four hours, he discovered that the true signification of Tory, was *bigot*—and of Whig, *patriot*: and he stuck to that version till it transformed him into a gold stick, in which capacity he died, having repeatedly and solemnly impressed upon his son the necessity and advantage of taking the same view of public affairs, with a view to arrive at similar results. And in the *way* in which he had been *trained up*, most religiously had gone the Earl; and see the result: he, also, attained to eminent and responsible office—to wit, that of Lord Steward of the Household. Now, things standing thus—how could the Earl so compromise his principles, and indirectly injure his party, as by suffering his daughter to marry a Tory? Great grief and vexation of spirit did *this* matter, therefore, occasion to that excellent nobleman. But, secondly, Aubrey not only declined to marry his cousin, but clenched his refusal, and sealed his final exclusion from the dawning good opinion and affections of the Earl, by marrying, as hath been

seen, some one else—Miss St. Clair. Thenceforth there was a great gulf between the Earl of Dreddlington and the Aubreys. Whenever they happened to meet, the Earl greeted him with an elaborate bow, and a petrifying smile; but, for the last seven years, not one syllable had passed between them. As for Mr. Aubrey, he had never been otherwise than amused at the eccentric airs of his magnificent kinsman. Now, was it not a hard thing for the Earl to bear—namely, the prospect there was that his barony and estates might devolve upon this same Aubrey, or his issue? for Lady Cecilia, alas! enjoyed but precarious health, and her chances of marrying seemed daily diminishing. This was a thorn in the poor Earl's flesh; a source of constant *worry* to him, sleeping and waking: and proud as he was, and with such good reason, he would have gone down on his knees and prayed to heaven to avert so direful a calamity—to see his daughter married.

Such being the relative position of Mr. Aubrey and the Earl of Dreddlington at the time when this history opens, it is easy for the reader to imagine the lively interest with which the Earl first heard of the tidings that a stranger had set up a title to the whole of the Yatton estates; and the silent and profound anxiety with which he continued to regard the progress of the affair. He obtained, from time to time, by means of confidential inquiries instituted by his solicitor, a general notion of the nature of the new claimant's pretensions; but, with a due degree of delicacy towards his unfortunate kinsman, he studiously concealed the interest he felt in so important a family question as the succession to the Yatton property. The Earl and his daughter were exceedingly anxious to *see* the claimant; and when he heard that that claimant was a gentleman of "decided Whig principles"—the Earl was very near setting it down as a sort of special interference of Providence in his favour; and one that in the natural order of things, would lead to the accomplishment of the other wishes of the Earl. Who knew but that, before a twelvemonth had passed over, the two branches of the family might not be in a fair way of being reunited—and thus, amongst other incidents, invest the Earl with the virtual patronage of the borough of Yatton, and, in the event of their return to power, strengthen his claim upon his party for his long-coveted marquise? He had gone to the continent a few days before the trial of the ejection at York; and did not return till a day or two after the Court of King's Bench had solemnly declared the validity of the plaintiff's title to the Yatton property, and consequently established his right of succession to the barony of Drelin-court. Of this event a lengthened account was given in one of the Yorkshire papers which fell under the Earl's eye the day after his arrival from abroad; and to the report of the decision of the question of law, was appended the following paragraph:—

"In consequence of the above decision, Mr. Aubrey, we are able to state on the best authority, has given formal notice of his intention to surrender the entire of the Yatton property without further litigation; thus making the promptest amends in his power to those whom he has—we cannot doubt unwittingly—injured. He has also accepted the Chiltern Hundreds, and has consequently retired from Parliament; so that the borough of Yatton is now vacant. We sincerely hope that the new proprietor of Yatton will either himself sit for the borough, and announce immediately his intention of doing so, or give his prompt and decisive support to some gentleman of decided Whig principles. We say *prompt*—for the enemy is vigilant and crafty. Men at Yatton! To the rescue!!!—Mr. Titmouse is now, we believe, in London. This fortunate gentleman is not only now in possession of the fine property at Yatton, with an unencumbered rent-roll of from twelve to fifteen thousand a-year, and a vast accumulation of rents to be handed over by the late possessor, but is now next but one in succession to the earldom of Dreddlington and

barony of Drelincourt, with the large family estates annexed thereto. We believe this is the oldest barony in the kingdom. It must be a source of great gratification to the present Earl to know that his probable successor professes the same liberal and enlightened political opinions, of which his lordship has, during his long and distinguished political life, been so able and consistent a supporter."

The Earl of Dreddlington was slightly flustered on reading the above paragraph. He perused it several times with increasing satisfaction. The time had at length arrived for him to take decisive steps; nay, duty to his newly-discovered kinsman required it.

Messrs. Titmouse and Gammon were walking arm-in-arm down Oxford Street, on their return from some livery-stables, where they had been looking at a horse which Titmouse was thinking of purchasing, when an incident occurred which ruffled him not a little. He had been recognised and publicly accosted by a vulgar fellow, with a yard-measure in his hand, and a large parcel of drapery under his arm—in fact, by our old friend Mr. Huckaback. In vain did Mr. Titmouse affect, for some time, not to see his old acquaintance, and to be earnestly engaged in conversation with Mr. Gammon.

"Ah, Titty!—Titmouse! Well, *Mister* Titmouse—how are you?—Devilish long time since we met!" Titmouse directed a look at him which he wished could have blighted him, and quickened his pace without taking any further notice of the presumptuous intruder. Huckaback's blood was up, however,—roused by this ungrateful and insolent treatment from one who had been under such great obligations to him; and quickening *his* pace also, he kept alongside with Titmouse.

"Ah," continued Huckaback, "why do you cut me in this way, Titty? You *aren't* ashamed of me, surely? Many's the time you've tramped up and down Oxford Street with your bundle and yard-measure—"

"Fellow!" at length exclaimed Titmouse indignantly, "'Pon my life I'll give you in charge if you go on so! Be off, you low fellow!—Dem vulgar brute!" he subjoined in a lower tone, bursting into perspiration, for he had not forgotten the insolent pertinacity of Huckaback's disposition.

"My eyes! Give me in charge? Come, I like that, rather—You vagabond! Pay me what you owe me! You're a swindler! You owe me fifty pounds, you do! You sent a man to rob me!"

"Will any one get a constable?" inquired Titmouse, who had grown as white as death. The little crowd that was collecting round them began to suspect, from Titmouse's agitated appearance, that there must be some foundation for the charges made against him.

"Oh, go, get a constable! Nothing I should like better! Ah, my fine gentleman—what's the time of day, when chaps like you are wound up so high?"

Gammon's interference was in vain. Huckaback got more abusive and noisy; no constable was at hand; so, to escape the intolerable interruption and nuisance, he beckoned a coach off the stand, which was close by; and, Titmouse and he stepping into it, they were soon out of sight and hearing of Mr. Huckaback. Having taken a shilling drive, they alighted, and walked towards Covent Garden. As they approached the hotel, they observed a yellow chariot, at once elegant and somewhat old-fashioned, rolling away from the door.

"I wonder who that is," said Gammon; "it's an earl's coronet on the panel; and a white-haired old gentleman was sitting low down in the corner——"

"Ah—it's no doubt a fine thing to be a lord, and all that—but I'll answer for it, some of 'em's as poor as a church mouse," replied Titmouse as they entered the hotel. At that moment the waiter, with a most profound bow,

presented him with a letter and a card, which had only the moment before been left for him. The card was thus :—

THE EARL OF DREDDLINGTON.

GROSVENOR SQUARE.

and there was written on it, in pencil, in rather a feeble and hurried character—“For Mr. Titmouse.”

“My stars, Mr. Gammon!” exclaimed Titmouse excitedly, addressing Mr. Gammon, who also seemed greatly interested by the occurrence. They both repaired to a vacant table at the extremity of the room; and Titmouse, with not a little trepidation, hastily breaking a large seal which contained the Earl’s family arms, with their crowded quarterings and grim supporters—better appreciated by Gammon, however, than by Titmouse—opened the ample envelope, and, unfolding its thick gilt-edged enclosure, read as follows :—

“The Earl of Dreddlington has the honour of waiting upon Mr. Titmouse, in whom he is very happy to have, though unexpectedly, discovered so near a kinsman. On the event which has brought this to pass, the Earl congratulates himself not less than Mr. Titmouse, and hopes for the earliest opportunity of a personal introduction. The Earl leaves town to-day, and will not return till Monday next, on which day he begs the favour of Mr. Titmouse’s company to dinner, at six o’clock. He may depend upon its being strictly a family reunion; the only person present, besides Mr. Titmouse and the Earl, being the Lady Cecilia.

“Grosvenor Square, Thursday.
“TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE, ESQ., etc., etc.”

As soon as Titmouse had read the above, still holding it in his hand, he gazed at Gammon with mute apprehension and delight. Of the existence, indeed, of the magnificent personage who had just introduced himself, Titmouse had certainly heard, from time to time, since the commencement of the proceedings which had just been so successfully terminated. He had seen the brightness, to be sure; but, as a sort of remote splendour, like that of a fixed star which gleamed brightly, but at too vast a distance to have any sensible influence, or even to arrest his attention. After a little while, Titmouse began to chatter very volubly; but Gammon, after reading over the note once or twice, seemed not much inclined for conversation: and, had Titmouse been accustomed to observation, he might have gathered, from the eye and brow of Gammon, that that gentleman’s mind was very deeply occupied by some matter or other, probably suggested by the incident which had just taken place. Titmouse, by the by, called for pens, ink, and paper,—“the very best gilt-edged paper, mind”—and prepared to reply to Lord Dreddlington’s note. Gammon, however, who knew the peculiarities of his friend’s style of correspondence, suggested that *he* should draw up, and Titmouse copy the following note. This was presently done; but when Gammon observed how thickly studded it was with capital letters, the numerous flourishes with which it was garnished, and its more than questionable orthography, he prevailed on Titmouse, after some little difficulty, to allow him to transcribe the note which was to be sent to Lord Dreddlington. Here it is—

"Mr. Titmouse begs to present his compliments to the Earl of Dreddlington, and to express the high sense he entertains of the kind consideration evinced by his lordship in his call and note of to-day. One of the most gratifying circumstances connected with Mr. Titmouse's recent success, is the distinguished alliance which his lordship has been so prompt and courteous in recognizing. Mr. Titmouse will feel the greatest pleasure in availing himself of the Earl of Dreddlington's invitation to dinner for Monday next.

"Cabbage-Stalk Hotel, Thursday.

"The Right Honble. the EARL OF DREDDLINGTON, etc., etc."

"Have you a 'Peerage' here, waiter?" inquired Gammon, as the waiter brought him a lighted taper. *Debrett* was shortly laid before him; and turning to the name of Dreddlington, he read over what has been already laid before the reader. "Humph—'*Lady Cecilia*'—here she is—his daughter—I thought as much—I see!" This was what passed through his mind, as—having left Titmouse, who set off to deposit a card and the above "Answer" at Lord Dreddlington's—he made his way towards the delectable regions in which their office was situated—Saffron Hill. "'Tis curious—amusing—interesting, to observe his progress"—continued Gammon to himself—"Tag-rag—and his daughter; *Quirk*—and his daughter; *The Earl of Dreddlington*—and his daughter. How many more! Happy! happy! happy Titmouse!"

The sun that was rising upon Titmouse was setting upon the Aubreys. Dear, delightful—now too dear, now too delightful—Yatton! the shades of evening are descending upon thee, and thy virtuous but afflicted occupants, who, early on the morrow, quit thee for ever. Approach silently yon conservatory. Behold in the midst of it the dark slight figure of a lady, solitary, motionless, in melancholy attitude—her hands clasped before her: it is Miss Aubrey. Her face is beautiful, but grief is in her eye; and her bosom heaves with sighs, which, gentle as they are, are yet the only sounds audible. Yes, that is the sweet and once joyous Kate Aubrey.

'Twas she, indeed; and this was her last visit to her conservatory. Many rare, delicate, and beautiful flowers were there; the air was laden with the fragrant odours which they exhaled, as it were in sighs, on account of the dreaded departure of their lovely mistress. At length she stooped down, and in stooping, a tear fell right upon the small sprig of geranium which she gently detached from its stem, and placed in her bosom. "Sweet flowers," thought she, "who will tend you as I have tended you, when I am gone? Why do you look now more beautiful than ever you did before?" Her eye fell upon the spot on which, till the day before, had stood her aviary. Poor Kate had sent it, as a present, to Lady De la Zouch, and it was then at Fotheringham Castle.

What a flutter there used to be among the beautiful little creatures when they perceived Kate's approach! She turned her head away. She felt oppressed, and attributed it to the closeness of the conservatory—the strength of the odours given out by the numerous flowers; but it was sorrow that oppressed her; and she was in a state at once of mental excitement and physical exhaustion. The last few weeks had been an interval of exquisite suffering. She could not be happy alone, and yet could not bear the company of her brother and sister-in-law, nor that of their innocent children. Quitting the conservatory with a look of lingering fondness, she passed along into the house with a hurried step, and escaped, unobserved, to her chamber—the very chamber in which the reader obtained his first distant and shadowy glimpse of her; and in which, now entering it silently and suddenly, the door being only closed, not shut, she observed her faithful little maid Harriet, sitting in tears before a melancholy heap of packages prepared for travelling on the morrow. She rose as Miss Aubrey entered, and presently exclaimed passionately, bursting afresh into tears, "Ma'am, I *can't* leave you—indeed I *can't*!"

I know all your ways; I won't go to any one else! I shall hate service! and I know they'll hate *me* too; for I shall cry myself to death!" "Come, come, Harriet," faltered Miss Aubrey, "this is very foolish; nay, it is unkind to distress me in this manner at the last moment." "Oh, ma'am, if you *did* but know how I love you! How I'd go on my knees to serve you all the rest of the days of my life!" "Don't talk in that way, Harriet; that's a good girl," said Miss Aubrey rather faintly, and, sinking into the chair, she buried her face in her handkerchief, "you know I've had a great deal to go through, Harriet, and am in very poor spirits." "I know it, ma'am, I do; and that's why I can't *bear* to leave you!" She sank on her knees beside Miss Aubrey. "Oh, ma'am, if you would but let me stay with you! I've been trying, ever since you first told me, to make up my mind to part with you; and, now it's coming to the time, I can't, ma'am—indeed, I can't! If you did but know, ma'am, what my thoughts have been while I've been folding and packing up your dresses here; to think that I sha'n't be with you to unpack them; it's very hard, ma'am, that madam's maid is to go with her, and I'm not to go with *you*!"

"We must have made a choice, Harriet," said Miss Aubrey, with forced calmness. "Yes, ma'am; but why didn't you choose us both? Because we've both always done our best; and, as for me, you've never spoke an unkind word to me in your life——"

"Harriet, Harriet," said Miss Aubrey tremulously, "I've several times explained to you that we cannot any longer afford each to have our own maid; and Mrs. Aubrey's maid is older than you, and knows how to manage children——"

"What signifies *affording*, ma'am? Neither she nor I will ever take a shilling of wages; I'd really rather serve you for nothing, ma'am, than any other lady for a hundred pounds a-year! Oh, so happy as I've been in your service, ma'am!" she added bitterly.

"Don't, Harriet—you would not, if you knew the pain you give me," said Miss Aubrey faintly. Harriet got up, poured out a glass of water, and forced her pale mistress to swallow a little, which presently revived her.

"Harriet," said she, "you have never once disobeyed me, and *now* I am certain that you won't. I assure you that we have made all our arrangements, and cannot alter them. I have been very fortunate in obtaining for you so kind a mistress as Lady Stratton. Remember, Harriet, she was the oldest bosom friend of my——" Miss Aubrey's voice trembled, and she ceased speaking for a minute or two, during which she struggled against her feelings with momentary success. "Here's the prayer-book," she presently resumed, opening a drawer in her dressing-table, and taking out a small volume—"Here's the prayer-book I promised you; it is very prettily bound, and I have written your name in it, Harriet, as you desired. Take it, and keep it for my sake. Will you?"

"Oh, ma'am," replied the girl bitterly, "I shall never bear to look at it, but I'll never part with it till I die."

"Now leave me, Harriet, for a short time—I wish to be alone," said Miss Aubrey; and she was obeyed. She presently rose and bolted the door; and then, secure from interruption, walked slowly to and fro for some time; and a long and deep current of melancholy thoughts and feelings flowed through her mind and her heart. She had but a short time before seen her sister's sweet children put into their little beds for the last time at Yatton; and, together with their mother, had hung fondly over them, kissing and embracing them—their little fellow-wanderers—till her feelings compelled her to leave them. One by one all the dear innumerable ties which had attached her to Yatton, and everything connected with it, ever since her birth, had been

severed and broken—ties, not only the strength, but very existence of which she had scarce been aware of till then. She had bade—as had all of them—repeated and agonizing farewells to dear and old friends. Her very heart within her trembled as she gazed at the objects familiar to her eye, and pregnant with innumerable little softening associations, ever since her infancy. Nothing around them now belonged to *them*—but to a stranger—to one who—she shuddered with disgust. She thought of the fearful position in which her brother was placed—entirely at the mercy of, it might be, selfish and rapacious men—what indeed was to become of all of them? At length she threw herself into the large old easy chair which stood near the window, and with a fluttering heart and hasty tremulous hand, drew an open letter from her bosom. She held it for some moments, as if dreading again to peruse it—but at length unfolded and read a portion of it. 'Twas full of fervent and at the same time delicate expressions of fondness; and after a short while her hand dropped with the letter upon her lap, and she burst into a passionate flood of tears. After an interval of several minutes, she again took up the letter—read a little further—still more and more moved by the generous and noble sentiments it contained—and, at length, utterly overcome, she again dropped her hand, and sobbed aloud long and vehemently. "It cannot—cannot—no, it cannot be," she murmured, and yielded to her feelings for a long while, her tears showering down her pallid, beautiful cheeks.

At length she came to the conclusion: in a kind of agony she pressed the signature to her lips, and then hastily folding up the letter, replaced it whence she had taken it, and continued sobbing bitterly. Alas, what additional poignancy did this give to the agonies of her last evening at Yatton! She had, however, become somewhat calmer by the time that she heard the door hastily, but gently tapped at, and then attempted to be opened. Miss Aubrey rose and unbolted it, and Mrs. Aubrey entered, her beautiful countenance as pale and sad as that of her sister-in-law. She, however, was both wife and mother; and the various cares which these relations entailed upon her at a bitter moment like the present, served in some measure to occupy her thoughts, and prevent her from being absorbed by the heart-breaking circumstances which surrounded her. Suffering had, however, a little impaired her beauty; her cheek was very pale, and her eye and brow laden with trouble.

"Kate, dear Kate," said she rather quickly, closing the door after her, "what is to be done? Did you hear carriage-wheels a few moments ago? Who do you think have arrived? As I fancied would be the case, the De la Zouches." Miss Aubrey trembled and turned pale. "You must see—you must see—Lady De la Zouch, Kate—they have driven from Fotheringham on purpose to take—*once more*—a last farewell! 'Tis very painful, but what can be done? You know what dear, dear, good friends they are!"

"Is Lord De la Zouch come, also?" inquired Miss Aubrey apprehensively.

"I will not deceive you, dearest Kate, they are *all* come; but she only is in the house: they are gone out to look for Charles, who is walking in the park." Miss Aubrey gave a sudden shudder; and after evidently a violent struggle with her feelings, the colour having entirely deserted her face, and left it of an ashy whiteness, "I cannot muster up resolution enough, Agnes," she whispered. "I know their errand."

"Care not about their errand, love! You shall not be troubled—you shall not be persecuted." Miss Aubrey shook her head, and grasped Mrs. Aubrey's hand. "They do not, they cannot persecute me. It is a cruel and harsh word to use—and!—consider how noble, how disinterested is their conduct; it is that which subdues me!" Mrs. Aubrey threw her arms round her agitated sister-in-law, and tenderly kissed her forehead.

"Oh, Agnes!" faltered Miss Aubrey, pressing her hand upon her heart to

relieve the intolerable oppression which she suffered—"would to Heaven that I had never seen—never thought of him!" "Don't fear, Kate! that he will attempt to see you on so sad an occasion as this. Delamere is a man of infinite delicacy and generosity!" "I know he is, I know he is," gasped Miss Aubrey.

"Stay, I'll tell you what to do; I'll go down and return with Lady De la Zouch: we can see her here, undisturbed and alone, for a few moments; and then, nothing painful *can* occur. Shall I bring her?" she inquired, rising. Miss Aubrey did not dissent; and within a very few minutes' time, Mrs. Aubrey returned, accompanied by Lady De la Zouch, rather an elderly woman, her countenance still handsome; of very dignified carriage, of an extremely mild disposition, and passionately fond of Miss Aubrey. Hastily drawing aside her veil as she entered the room, she stepped quickly up to Miss Aubrey, kissed her, and for a few moments grasped her hands in silence.

"This is very sad work, Miss Aubrey," said she at length, hurriedly glancing at her luggage lying piled up at the other end of the room. Miss Aubrey made no answer, but shook her head. "It was useless attempting it, we could not stay at home; we have risked being charged with cruel intrusion; forgive me, dearest, will you! *They* will not come near you!" Miss Aubrey trembled. "I feel as if I were parting with a daughter, Kate," said Lady De la Zouch with sudden emotion. "How your mamma and I loved one another!" and she burst into tears.

"For mercy's sake, open the window; I feel suffocated," faltered Miss Aubrey. Mrs. Aubrey threw up the window, and the cool refreshing breeze of evening quickly diffused itself through the apartment, and revived the drooping spirits of Miss Aubrey, who walked gently to and fro about the room, supported by Lady De la Zouch and Mrs. Aubrey, and soon recovered a tolerable degree of composure. The three ladies presently stood, arm in arm, gazing through the deep bay window at the fine and extensive prospect which it commanded. The gloom of evening was beginning to steal over the landscape.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Miss Aubrey faintly, with a deep sigh.

"The window in the northern tower of the castle commands a still more extensive view," said Lady De la Zouch. Miss Aubrey suddenly looked at her, and burst into tears. After standing gazing through the window for some time longer, they stepped back into the room, and were soon engaged in deep and earnest conversation.

For the last three weeks Mr. Aubrey had addressed himself with calmness and energy to the painful duties which had devolved upon him, of *setting his house in order*. Immediately after quitting the dinner table that day—a mere nominal meal to himself, his wife, and sister—he had retired to the library, to complete the extensive and important arrangements consequent upon his abandonment of Yatton; and after about an hour thus occupied, he went forth to take a solitary walk—a melancholy—a last walk about the property. It was a moment which severely tried his fortitude; but that fortitude stood the trial. He was a man of lively sensibilities, and appreciated, to its utmost extent, the melancholy and alarming change which had come over his fortunes. Surely even the bluntest and coarsest feelings which ever tried to disguise and dignify themselves under the name of *Stoicism*—to convert into bravery and fortitude a stupid, sullen insensibility—must have been not a little shaken by such scenes as Mr. Aubrey had had to pass through during the last few weeks—scenes which I do not choose to distress the reader's feelings by dwelling upon in detail. Mr. Aubrey had no mean pretensions to real philosophy; but he had still juster pretensions to an infinitely higher character—that of a *Christian*. He had a firm unwavering conviction that whatever befell him, either of good or evil, was the ordination of the Almighty—ininitely wise,

infinitely good;—and this was the source of his fortitude and resignation. He felt himself here standing upon ground that was immovable.

To avert the misfortune which menaced him, he had neglected no rational and conscientious means. To retain the advantages of fortune and station to which he had believed himself born, he had made the most strenuous exertions consistent with a rigid sense of honour. What, indeed, could he have done that he had not done? He had caused the claims of his opponent to be subjected to as severe and skilful a scrutiny as the wit of man could suggest; *and they had stood the test.* Those claims, and his own, had been each of them placed in the scales of justice; those scales had been held up, and poised by the pure and firm hands to which the laws of God, and of the country, had committed the administration of justice: on what ground could a just and reasonable man quarrel with or repine at the issue? And supposing that a perverse and subtle ingenuity in his legal advisers could have devised means for delaying his surrender of the property to him who had been solemnly declared its true owner, what real and ultimate advantage could he have obtained by such a dishonourable line of conduct? Could the spirit of the Christian religion tolerate the bare idea of it? Could such purposes or intentions consist for one instant with the consciousness that the awful eye of God was always upon every thought of his mind, every feeling of his heart, every purpose of his will? A thorough and lively conviction of God's moral government of the world secured him a happy composure—a glorious and immovable resolution; it enabled him to form a true estimate of things; it extracted the sting from grief and regret: it dispelled the gloom which would otherwise have settled portentously upon the future. Thus he had not *forgotten the exhortation which spoke unto him, as unto a child: My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him.* And if, indeed, religion had not done this for Mr. Aubrey, what could it have done, what would it have been worth? Thus is it, thought Aubrey with humble but cheerful confidence, with the Almighty—who hath declared himself the *Father of the spirits of all flesh*—

“Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face!
Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his works in vain!
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain!”

“Therefore, O my God!” thought Aubrey, as he gazed upon the lovely scenes familiar to him from his birth, and from which, a few short hours were to separate him for ever, “I do acknowledge Thy hand in what has befallen me, and Thy mercy which enables me to bear it, as from Thee.” The scene around him was tranquil and beautiful—inexpressibly beautiful. He stood under the shadow of a mighty elm tree, the last of a long and noble avenue, which he had been pacing in deep thought for upwards of an hour. The ground was considerably elevated above the level of the rest of the park. No sound disturbed the serene repose of the approaching evening, except the distant and gradually diminishing sounds issuing from an old rookery, and the faint low bubbling of a clear streamlet that flowed not far from where he stood. Here and there, under the deepening shadows cast by the lofty trees, might be seen the glancing forms of deer, the only live things visible. “Life,” said Aubrey to himself, with a sigh, as he leaned against the trunk of the grand old tree under which he stood, and gazed with a fond and mournful eye on the lovely scenes stretching before him, to which the subdued radiance of the departing sunlight communicated a tone of tender pensiveness; “life is, in truth, what the Scripture—what the voice of nature—represents it—a long journey, during which the

traveller stops at many resting-places. Some of them are more, others less beautiful; from some he parts with more, from others with less regret; but part he must, and pursue his journey, though he may often turn back to gaze with lingering fondness and admiration at the scene which he has last quitted. The next stage may be—as *all his journey might have been*—bleak and desolate; but through that he is only passing: he will not be condemned to stay in it, as he was not permitted to dwell in the other; he is still journeying on, along a route which he cannot mistake, to the point of his destination, his journey's end—the shores of the vast, immeasurable, boundless ocean of eternity—**HIS HOME!**”

The deepening shadows of evening warned him to retrace his steps to the Hall. Before quitting the spot upon which he had been so long standing, he turned his head a little towards the right, to take a last view of an object which called forth tender and painful feeling—it was the old sycamore which his sister's intercession had saved from the axe. There it stood, feeble and venerable object! its leafless silvery-grey branches becoming dim and indistinct, yet contrasting touchingly with the verdant strength of those by its side. A neat strong fence had been placed around it; but how much longer would it receive such care and attention? Aubrey thought of the comparison which had been made by his sister, and sighed as he looked his last at the old tree, and then slowly walked on towards the Hall.

When about halfway down the avenue, he beheld two figures apparently approaching him, but undistinguishable in the gloom and the distance. As they neared him, he recognised Lord De la Zouch and Mr. Delamere. Suspecting the object of their visit, which a little surprised him, since they had taken a final leave, and a very affecting one, the day before, he felt a little anxiety and embarrassment. Nor was he entirely mistaken. Lord De la Zouch, who advanced alone towards Aubrey—Mr. Delamere turning back—most seriously pressed his son's suit for the hand of Miss Aubrey, as he had often done before; declaring, that though undoubtedly he wished a year or two first to elapse, during which his son might complete his studies at Oxford, there was no object dearer to the heart of Lady De la Zouch and himself, than to see Miss Aubrey become their daughter-in-law. “Where,” said Lord De la Zouch, with much energy, “is he to look elsewhere for such a union of beauty, of accomplishments, of amiability, of high-mindedness?”

After a great deal of animated conversation on this subject, during which Mr. Aubrey assured Lord De la Zouch that *he* would say everything which he honourably could to induce his sister to entertain, or at all events, not to discard the suit of Delamere; at the same time reminding him of the firmness of her character, and the hopelessness of attempting to change any determination to which she had been led by her sense of delicacy and honour,—Lord De la Zouch addressed himself in a very earnest manner to matters more immediately relating to the personal interests of Mr. Aubrey; entered with lively anxiety into all his future plans and purposes; and once more pressed upon him the acceptance of most munificent offers of pecuniary assistance, which, with many fervent expressions of gratitude, Aubrey again declined. But he pledged himself to communicate freely with Lord De la Zouch, in the event of an occasion arising for such assistance as his lordship had already so generously volunteered. By this time Mr. Delamere had joined them, regarding Mr. Aubrey with infinite earnestness and apprehension. All, however, he said, was—and in a hurried manner to his father—“My mother has sent me to say that she is waiting for you in the carriage, and wishes that we should immediately return.” Lord De la Zouch and his son again took leave of Mr. Aubrey. “Remember, my dear Aubrey, remember the pledges you have repeated this evening,” said the former. “I do, I will!” replied Mr. Aubrey,

as they each wrung his hands; and then, having grasped those of Lady De la Zouch, who sat within the carriage powerfully affected, the door was shut; and they were quickly borne away from the presence and the residence of their afflicted friends.

While Mr. Aubrey stood gazing after them, with folded arms, in an attitude of melancholy abstraction, at the hall door, he was accosted by Dr. Tatham, who had come to him from the library, where he had been, till a short time before, busily engaged reducing into writing various matters which had been the subject of conversation between himself and Mr. Aubrey during the day.

"I am afraid, my dear friend," said the Doctor, "that there is a painful but interesting scene awaiting you. You will not, I am sure, forbear to gratify, by your momentary presence in the servants' hall, a body of your tenantry, who are there assembled, having come to pay you their parting respects."

"I would really rather be spared the painful scene," said Mr. Aubrey with emotion, "I am nearly unnerved as it is! Cannot you bid them adieu, in my name, and say, 'God bless them!'"

"You must come, my dear friend! If it *be* painful, it will be but for a moment; and the recollection of their hearty and humble expressions of affection and respect will be pleasant hereafter. Poor souls!" he added, with not a little emotion, "you should see how crowded is Mr. Griffiths' room with the presents they have each brought you, and which would surely keep your whole establishment for months! Cheeses, tongues, hams, bacon, and I know not what beside!"

"Come, Doctor," said Mr. Aubrey quickly, and with evidently a great effort, "I will see them, my humble and worthy friends! if it *be* for but a moment; but I would rather have been spared the scene."

He followed Dr. Tatham into the large servants' hall, which he found nearly filled by some forty or fifty of his late tenantry, who, as he entered, rose in troubled silence to receive him. There were lights, by which a hurried glance sufficed to show him the deep sorrow visible in their countenances. "Well, sir," commenced one of them after a moment's hesitation—he seemed to have been chosen the spokesman of those present—"we've come to tak' our leave; and a sad time it *be* for all of us, and it may be, sir, for you." He paused, and added abruptly—"I thought I could have said a word or two, sir, in the name of all of us, but I've clean forgotten all; and I wish we could all forget that we were come to part with you, sir;—but we sha'n't—no, never!—we shall never see your like again, sir! God help you, sir?" Again he paused, and struggled hard to conceal his emotions. Then he tried to say something further, but his voice failed him.

"Squire, it may be law; but it *be* not justice, we all do think, that hath taken Yatton from you, that was born to it," said one, who stood next to him who had first spoke. "Who ever heard o' a scratch in a bit of paper signifying the loss o' so much? It never were heard of afore, sir, an' cannot be right!" "You'll forgive me, Squire," said another, "but we shall never tak' to t' new one that's coming after you!"

"My worthy—my dear friends," commenced Mr. Aubrey, with melancholy and forced composure, as he stood beside Dr. Tatham, "this is a sad scene—one which I had not expected. I am quite unprepared for it. I have had lately to go through many very painful scenes; but few more so than the present. My dear friends, I can only say from my heart, God bless you all! I shall never forget you, whom I have always respected, and indeed been very proud of, as my tenantry, and whom I now, of course, look at as my friends only. We shall *never* forget you—"

"Lord Almighty bless you, sir, and Madam and Miss, and little Miss—and the little squire!" said a voice, in a vehement manner, from amidst the throng,

in tones which went to Mr. Aubrey's heart. His lips quivered, and he ceased speaking for some moments. At length he resumed.

"You see my feelings are a little shaken by the sufferings I have gone through. I have only a word more to say to you. Providence has seen fit, my friends, to deprive me of that which I had deemed to be my birthright. God is good and wise; and I bow, as we must all bow, to His will, with reverence and resignation. And also, my dear friends, let us always submit cheerfully to the laws under which we live. We must not quarrel with their decision, merely because it happens to be adverse to our own wishes. I, from my heart—and so must you from yours—acknowledge a firm, unshaken allegiance to the laws; they are ordained by God, and He demands our obedience to them!" He paused. "I have to thank you," he presently added, in a subdued tone, "my worthy friends, for many substantial tokens of your goodwill which you have brought with you this evening. I assure you sincerely, that I value them far more"—he paused, and it was some moments before he could proceed—"than if they had been of the most costly kind."

"Lord, only hearken to t' Squire!" called out a voice, as if on an impulse of eager affection, which its rough, honest speaker could not resist. This seemed entirely to deprive Mr. Aubrey of the power of utterance, and he turned suddenly towards Dr. Tatham with an overflowing eye and a convulsive quivering of the lips, that showed the powerful emotions with which he was contending. The next moment he stepped forward and shook hands with those nearest. He was quickly surrounded, and every one present grasped his hands, scarcely any of them able to utter more than a brief but ardent "God bless you, sir!"

"I am sure, my friends," said Dr. Tatham, almost as much affected as any of them, "that you cannot wish to prolong so affecting, so distressing a scene. Mr. Aubrey is much exhausted, and has a long journey to take early in the morning—and you had better now leave."

"Farewell! farewell, my kind and dear friends, farewell!—May God bless you all, and all your families!" said Mr. Aubrey, and, most powerfully affected, withdrew from a scene which he was not likely ever to forget. He retired, accompanied by Dr. Tatham, to his library, where Mr. Griffiths, his steward was in readiness to receive his signature to various documents. This done, the steward, after a few hurried expressions of affection and respect, withdrew; and Mr. Aubrey had completed all the arrangements, and transacted all the business which had required his attention before quitting Yatton, which, at an early hour in the morning, he was going to leave, and go direct to London, instead of accepting any of the numerous offers which he had received from his friends in the neighbourhood to take up with them his abode for, at all events, some considerable period. That, however, would have been entirely inconsistent with the plans for his future life, which he had formed and matured. He left the whole estate in admirable order and condition. There was not a farm vacant, not a tenant dissatisfied with the terms under which he held. Every document, all the accounts connected with the estate, after having been carefully examined by Mr. Parkinson, and Mr. Aubrey, and Mr. Griffiths, were in readiness for the most scrupulous and searching investigation on the part of Mr. Aubrey's successor and his agents.

Mr. Aubrey's library was already carefully packed up, and was to follow him, on the ensuing day, to London, by water; as also were several portions of the furniture—the residue of which was to be sold off within a day or two's time. How difficult—how very difficult had it been for them to choose which articles they would part with, and which retain! The favourite old high-backed easy-chair, which had been worked by Miss Aubrey herself; the beautiful ebony cabinet, which had been given by her father to her mother, who had given it

to Kate; the little chairs of Charles and Agnes—and in which Mr. Aubrey and Kate, and all their brothers and sisters, had sat when children; Mrs. Aubrey's piano; these, and a few other articles, had been successfully pleaded for by Mrs. Aubrey and Kate, and were to accompany, or rather follow them to London instead of passing, by the auctioneer's hammer, into the hands of strangers. The two old carriage-horses, which had drawn old Mrs. Aubrey in the family coach for many years, were to be turned to grass for the rest of their days at Lady Stratton's. Poor old Peggy was, in like manner, to have to herself a little field belonging to Dr. Tatham. Little Charles' pony, a beautiful animal, and most reluctantly parted with, was sent as a present, in his name, to Sir Harry Oldfield, one of his playfellows. Hector, the magnificent Newfoundland dog, was at the vehement instance of Pumpkin, the gardener, who almost went on his knees to beg for the animal, who declared that he loved the creature like a son—as I verily believe he did, for they were inseparable, and their attachment was mutual—given up to him, on his solemn promise to take great care of him. Then there was a poor animal which they hardly knew how to dispose of. It was a fine old favourite staghound, stone-blind, quite grey about the head, and so very feeble, that it could but just crawl in and out of its commodious kennel, and lie basking in the genial sunshine; wagging his tail when anyone spoke to it, and affectionately licking the hand that patted it. Thus had it treated Mr. Aubrey that very morning as he stood by, and stooped down to caress it for the last time. It was, at his earnest request, assigned to Dr. Tatham, kennel and all; indeed the worthy little Doctor would have filled his premises in a similar way, by way of having "keepsakes" and "memorials" of his friends. Miss Aubrey's beautiful little Marlborough spaniel, with its brilliant black eyes and long glossy graceful ears, was to accompany her to London.

As for the servants—the housekeeper was going to keep the house of her brother, a widower, at Grilston, and the butler was going to marry and quit service; and for the rest Mr. Parkinson had, at Mr. Aubrey's desire, written about them to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and Mr. Gammon had sent word that such of the establishment as chose might continue at Yatton, at all events till the pleasure of Mr. Titmouse, upon the subject, should have been known. All the servants had received a quarter's wages that morning from Mr. Griffiths, in the presence of Mr. Aubrey, who spoke kindly to each, and earnestly recommended them to conduct themselves respectfully towards his successor. Scarce any of them could answer him, otherwise than by an humble bow or curtsy, accompanied by sobs and tears. One of them did contrive to speak, and passionately expressed a wish that the first morsel Mr. Titmouse eat in the house might choke him—a sally which received so very grave a rebuke from Mr. Aubrey, as brought the hasty offender to her knees begging forgiveness, which, I need hardly say, she received, with a very kind admonition. Many of them most vehemently entreated to be allowed to accompany Mr. Aubrey and his family to London, and continue in their service, but in vain. Mr. Aubrey had made his selection, having taken only his own valet, and Mrs. Aubrey's maid, and one of the nursery-maids, and declaring that on no consideration would he think of being accompanied by any other of the servants.

There were some twenty or thirty poor old infirm cottagers, men and women, who had been for years weekly pensioners on the bounty of Yatton, and respecting whom Mr. Aubrey felt a painful anxiety. What could he do? He gave the sum of fifty pounds to Dr. Tatham for their use; and requested him to press their claims earnestly upon the new proprietor of Yatton. He also wrote almost as many letters as there were of these poor people, on their behalf, to his friends and neighbours. Oh, it was a moving scene that occurred

at each of their little cottages, when their benefactors, Mr. Aubrey, his wife, and sister, severally called to bid them farewell, and receive their humble and tearful blessings! But it was the parting with her school, which neither she nor her brother saw any probability of being kept up longer than for a month or two after their departure, that occasioned Kate the greatest distress. There were several reasons, which will occur to the reader, why no application should be made about the matter from her, or on her account, to Mr. Titmouse, even if she had not had reason to anticipate, from what she had heard of his character, that he was not a person to feel any interest in such an institution. Nor had she liked to trouble or burden the friends she left behind her, with the responsibility of supporting and superintending her little establishment. She had nothing for it, therefore, but to prepare the mistress and her scholars for the breaking up of the school, within a month of her departure from Yatton. She gave the worthy woman, the mistress, a present of a five-pound note, and five shillings a-piece to each of the children. She felt quite unequal to the task of personally taking leave of them, as she had intended, and several times attempted. She therefore, with many tears, wrote the following lines, and gave them to Dr. Tatham, to read aloud in the school, when their good and beautiful writer should be far on her way towards London. The little Doctor paused a good many times while he read it, and complained of his glasses.

“My dear little girls—You know that I have already bid each of you good bye; and though I tried to say something to all of you at once, I was not able, because I was so sorry to part with you, and tell you that my little school must be given up. So I have written these few lines, to tell you that I love you all, and have tried to be a good friend to you. Be sure not to forget your spelling and reading, and your needle. Your mothers have promised to hear you say your catechisms; you must also be sure to say your prayers, and to read your Bibles, and to behave very seriously at church, and to be always dutiful to your parents. Then God will bless you all. I hope you will not forget us, for we shall often think of you when we are a great way off; and Dr. Tatham will now and then write and tell us how you are going on. Farewell, my dear little girls; and may God bless and preserve you all! This is the prayer of both of us—Mrs. Aubrey and

“CATHARINE AUBREY.

“*Yatton, 15th May, 18—.*”

The above was not written in the uniform and beautiful hand usual with Miss Aubrey; it was, on the contrary, rather irregular, and evidently written hastily; but Dr. Tatham preserved it to the day of his death, and always thought it beautiful.

On the ensuing morning, at a very early hour, Dr. Tatham left the vicarage, to pay his last visit to friends whom it almost broke his heart to part with, in all human probability for ever. He started, but on a moment's reflection ceased to be surprised, at the sight of Mr. Aubrey approaching him from the direction of the little churchyard. He was calm, but his countenance bore the traces of very recent emotion. They greeted each other in silence, and so walked on for some time, arm in arm, slowly towards the Hall. It was a dull heavy morning, almost threatening rain. The air seemed full of oppression. The only sounds audible were the hoarse clamorous sounds issuing from the old rookery, at some distance on their left. They interchanged but few words as they walked along the winding pathway to the Hall. The first thing that attracted their eyes on passing under the gateway, was the large old family carriage standing opposite the Hall door, where stood some luggage, sufficient for the journey, ready to be placed upon it; the remainder having been sent

on the day before to London. They were all up and dressed. The children were taking their last breakfast in the nursery; Charles making many inquiries of the weeping servants, which they could answer only by tears and kisses. In vain was the breakfast-table spread for the senior travellers. There sat poor Kate, in travelling trim, before the antique silver urn, attempting to perform, with tremulous hand, her accustomed office; but neither she nor Mrs. Aubrey was equal to the task; which, summoning the housekeeper into the room, they devolved upon her, and which she performed in perturbed silence. Mr. Aubrey and Dr. Tatham were standing there; but neither of them spoke. A short time before, Mr. Aubrey had requested the servants to be summoned, as usual, to morning prayer, in the accustomed room, and requested Dr. Tatham to officiate. As soon, however, as the sorrowful little assemblage was collected before him, he whispered to Mr. Aubrey that he felt unequal to go through the duty with the composure it required; and after a pause, he said, "Let us kneel down;" and in a low voice, often interrupted by his own emotions, and the sobs of those around him, he read, with touching simplicity and solemnity, the ninety-first psalm; adding the Lord's prayer, and a benediction.

The bitter preparations for starting at an early hour, seven o'clock, were soon afterwards completed. Half smothered with the kisses and caresses of the affectionate servants, little Charles and Agnes were already seated in the carriage, on the laps of their two attendants, exclaiming eagerly, "Come, papa! come, mamma! the horses are ready to start!" Just then, poor Pumpkin, the gardener, scarce able to speak, made his appearance, his arms full of nosegays, which he had been culling for the last two hours—having one a-piece for every one of the travellers, servants, and children, and all. The loud angry bark of Hector was heard from time to time, little Charles calling loudly for him; but Pumpkin had fastened him up, for fear of his starting off after the carriage. At length, scarce having tasted breakfast, the travellers made their appearance at the Hall door. Kate and Mrs. Aubrey were utterly overcome at the sight of the carriage, and wept bitterly. They threw their arms passionately around, and kissed their venerable friend and pastor, Dr. Tatham, who was but little less agitated than themselves. Then they tore themselves from him, and hastily got into the carriage. As he stood alone, bare-headed, on their quitting him, he lifted his hands, but could scarce utter a parting benediction. Mr. Aubrey, with a flushed cheek and quivering lip, then grasped his hand, whispering, "Farewell, my dear and venerable friend! Farewell!" "The Lord God of thy fathers bless thee!" murmured Dr. Tatham, clasping Mr. Aubrey's hand in both of his own, and looking solemnly upward. Mr. Aubrey, taking off his hat, turned towards him an unutterable look, then waving his hand to the group of agitated servants that stood within and without the door, he stepped into the carriage; the door was shut; and they rolled slowly away.

Outside the park gates were collected more than a hundred people to bid them farewell—all the men, when the carriage came in sight, taking off their hats. The carriage stopped for a moment. "God bless you all! God bless you!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, waving his hand, whilst from each window were extended the white hands of Kate and Mrs. Aubrey, which were fervently kissed and shaken by those who were nearest. Again the carriage moved on; and, quickening their speed, the horses soon bore them out of the village. Within less than half an hour afterwards, the tearful eyes of the travellers, as they passed a familiar turning of the road, had looked their last on Yatton!

CHAPTER XVIII.

RANK is very apt to attract and dazzle vulgar and feeble optics; and the knowledge that such is its effect, is unspeakably gratifying to a vain and ignorant possessor of that rank. Of the truth of one part of this observation, take as an illustration the case of Tittlebat Titmouse; of the other, that of the Earl of Dreddlinton. The former's dinner engagement with the latter, his august and awful kinsman, was an event of such magnitude as to absorb almost all his faculties in the contemplation of it, and also occasion him great anxiety in preparing for an effective appearance upon so signal an occasion: Mr. Gammon had repeatedly, during the interval, instructed his anxious pupil, if so he might be called, as to the manner in which he ought to behave. He was—Heaven save the mark, poor Titmouse!—to assume an air of mingled deference, self-possession, and firmness; not to be over-awed by the greatness with which he would be brought into contact, nor unduly elated by a sense of his own suddenly acquired importance. He was, on the other hand, to steer evenly between the extremes of timorousness and temerity—to aim at that happy mean, so grateful to those able to appreciate the effort and object of those attaining to it. Titmouse was to remember that, great as was the Earl of Dreddlinton, he was yet *but a man*—related, too, by consanguinity to him, the aforesaid Titmouse, who might, moreover, before many years should have elapsed, become himself the Earl of Dreddlinton, or at least Lord Drelincourt, and by consequence equally entitled, with the present possessor of that resplendent position, to the homage of mankind. At the same time that the Earl's advanced years gave him a natural claim to the respect and deference of his young kinsman—(whom, moreover, he was about to introduce into the sublime regions of aristocracy, and also of political society)—Titmouse might derive a few ingredients of consolation from the reflection, that his income probably *exceeded* by a third that of the Earl of Dreddlinton. This is the sum of Mr. Gammon's *general* instructions to his eager and excited pupil; but he also gave Titmouse many minor hints and suggestions. He was to drink very little wine—(whereat Titmouse demurred somewhat vehemently, and asked “How the d—l he was to *get his steam up?*”)—and on no account to call for beer or porter, to which plebeian beverages, indeed, he might consider himself as having bid a long and last adieu;—to say “my lord” and “your lordship” in addressing the Earl—and “your ladyship” in addressing Lady Cecilia;—and, above all, never to appear in a hurry, but to do and say whatever he had to do and say calmly; for that the nerves of aristocracy were very delicate, and could not bear a bustle, or the slightest display of energy or feeling. Then, as to his *dress*—Gammon, feeling himself treading on very doubtful ground, intimated merely that the essence of true fashion was *simplicity*—but here Titmouse grew fidgety, and his Mentor ceased.

During the night which ushered in the eventful day of Titmouse's dining with the Earl of Dreddlinton, our friend got but very little sleep. Early in the morning he engaged a most respectable glass-coach to convey him westward in something like style; and before noon, his anxieties were set at rest by the punctual arrival of various articles of dress, and decoration, and scent—for Titmouse had a great idea of scents. As for his new watch and its brilliant gold guard-chain—his eyes gloated upon them. What, he thought, should he have been without them! About half-past three o'clock he retired to his bedroom, and resigned himself into the hands of the tip-top hairdresser from the Strand, whose agreeable manipulations, and still more agreeable small talk, occupied upwards of an hour, Titmouse giving the anxious operator abundant

notice of the high quarter in which his handiwork was likely soon to be scrutinized.

"Pray-a, can you tell me," quoth Titmouse, drawingly, shortly after Twirl had commenced his operations, "how long it will take me to get from this infernal part of the town to Grosvenor Square?—*Dem* long way, isn't it, Mr. what's-your-name?"

"Grosvenor Square, sir?" said Twirl glibly, but with a perceptible dash of deference in his tone; "why it *is* as one might say a tolerable way off, certainly; but you can't well miss your way *there*, sir, of all places in town——"

My coachman," interrupted Titmouse, with a fine air, "of course, had I thought f it, *he* must know." "Oh! to be sure, sir. There's none but people of the most *highest* rank lives in that quarter, sir. Excuse me, sir, but I've a brother-in-law that's valet to the Duke of Dunderwhistle there——" "Indeed! How far off is that from Lord Dreddlington's?" inquired Titmouse carelessly. "Lord Dreddlington's, sir?—Well, I never! Isn't it particular strange, if that's where you're going, sir—it's next door to the Duke's—the very next door, sir!" "Pon my life, is it indeed? How devilish odd!" "Know the Earl of Dreddlington hen, I presume, sir?" "Ya-a-s, I should think so; he's my—my—relation, that's all; and devilish near too!"

Mr. Twirl instantly conceived a kind of reverence for the gentleman upon whom he was operating. "Well, sir," he presently added, in a still more respectful tone than before, "p'raps you'll think it a liberty, sir; but, do you now, I've several times had the honour of seeing his lordship in the street at little distance—and there's a—a family likeness between you, sir—'pon my word, sir. It struck me, directly I saw you, that you was like some nob I'd seen at the other end of the town." [Here Titmouse experienced pleasurable sensations, similar to those of a cat when you pass your hand down its glossy coat in the right direction]. "Will you allow me, sir, to give your hair a good rushing, sir, before I dress it? I always like to take the *greatest* pains with the hair of my quality customers!—Do you know, sir, that I had the honour of dressing his Grace's hair for a whole fortnight together, once when my rother-in-law was ill! and though, p'raps I oughtn't to say it, his Grace expressed the highest satisfaction at my exertions, sir."

"Pon my life, and I should say you were an uncommon good hand—I've known lots worse, I assure you; men that would have spoiled the best head of hair going, by Jove!"

"Sir, you're very kind. I assure you, sir, that to do justice to a *gent's* hair requires an uncommon deal of practice, and a sort of *nat'ral* talent for it besides. Lord, sir! how much depends on a gent's hair, don't it? Of two coming into a room, it makes all the difference, sir! Believe me, sir, it's no use being well-dressed, nay, nor good-looking, if as how the hair a'n't done what I *all correct*."

"By Jove, I really think you're nigh about the mark," said Titmouse; and after a pause, during which Mr. Twirl had been brushing away at one particular part of the head with some vehemence; "well," he exclaimed, with a sigh, easing for a moment his vigorous exertions—"I'm *blest* if I can manage it, do what I will!"

"Eh? What's that? What is it?" inquired Titmouse, a little alarmedly. "Why, sir, it's what we gents, in our profession, calls a *feather*, which is the most *hobstinatest* thing in nature." "What's a *feather*?" quoth Titmouse, rather faintly. "You see, sir, 'tis when a small lot of hair on a gent's head *will* stick up, do all we can to try and get it down; and (excuse me, sir) *you've* got a regular rattler!"

Titmouse put up his hand to feel, Twirl guiding it to the fatal spot: there it was, just as Twirl had described it. "What's to be done?" murmured Tit-

mouse. "I'm afraid, sir, you don't use our OSTRICH GREASE and RHINOCEROS MARROW, sir."

"Your *what?*" cried Titmouse apprehensively, with a dismally distinct recollection of the tragedy of the Cyanochaitanthropopoion, and the Damascus Cream, and the Tetaragmenon Abracadabra; matters which he at once mentioned to Mr. Twirl.

"Ah, it's not *my* custom, sir," quoth Twirl, "to run down other gents' inventions; but my real opinion is, that they're all an imposition—a rank imposition, sir. I didn't like to say it, sir; but I soon saw there had been somebody a-practising on your hair."

"What, is it *very* plain?" cried Titmouse, starting up and stepping to the glass.

"No, sir—not so *very* plain; only *you've* got, as I might say, *accustomed* to the sight of it; but when it's properly curled, and puckered up, and frizzed about, it won't show—nor the feather neither, sir; so, by your leave, here goes, sir;" and, after about a quarter-of-an-hour's more labour, he succeeded in parting it right down the middle of the head, bringing it out into a bold curl towards each eyebrow, and giving our friend quite a new and very fascinating appearance, even in his own eyes. And as for the colour—it really was not so very marked, after all; a little purple-hued and mottled, to be sure, in parts, but not to a degree to attract the eye of a casual observer. Twirl having declared, at length, his labours completed—regarding Titmouse's head with a look of proud satisfaction—Titmouse paid him half-a-crown, and also ordered a pot of ostrich grease and of rhinoceros marrow (the one being *suet*, the other *lard*, differently scented and coloured), and was soon left at liberty to proceed with the important duties of the toilet. It took him a good while; but in the end he was supremely successful. He wore black tights (*i.e.*, pantaloons fitting closely to his legs, and tied round his ankles with black ribbons), silk stockings, and shoes with glittering silver buckles. His white neckerchief was tied with great elegance, not a wrinkle superfluous being visible in it. His shirt-front of lace, had two handsome diamond pins, connected together by a little delicate gold chain, glistening in the midst of it. Then he had a white waistcoat edge, next a crimson one, and lastly a glorious sky-blue satin waistcoat, spangled all over with gold flowers inwrought—and across it hung his new gold watchguard, and his silver guard for his eyeglass, producing an inconceivably fine effect. His coat was of a light-brown, of exquisite cut, fitting him as closely as if he had been born in it, and with burnished brass buttons, of sugar-loaf shape. 'Twas padded also with great judgment, and really took off more of his round-shouldered awkwardness of figure than any coat he had ever before had. Then he had a fine white pocket handkerchief, soaked in lavender water, and immaculate white kid gloves. Thus habited, he stood before his glass, powing fifty different times, and adjusting his expression to various elegant forms of address. He was particularly struck with the combined effect of the two curls of his hair towards each eye, and the hair underneath his chin curved upwards on each side of his mouth in complete symmetry. I have ascertained from Mr. Titmouse himself, that on this memorable occasion of his first introduction to *nobility*, every item of dress and decoration was entirely new; and when at length his labours had been completed, he felt great composure of mind, and a consciousness of the effect he must produce. His "carriage" was presently announced; and after keeping it standing for a few minutes, merely for form's sake, he gently placed his hat upon his head, drew on one glove, took his little ebony cane in his hand, and, with a hurried inward prayer that he might be equal to the occasion, stepped forth from his apartment, and passed on to the glass coach. Such a brilliant little figure, I will take upon myself to say, had never before issued, nor will perhaps ever

again issue, from the Cabbage-stalk Hotel. The waiters, whom he passed, inclined towards him with instinctive reverence. He was *very* fine, to be sure; but who could, they justly thought, be dressed too finely that had ten thousand a-year, and was going to dine with a lord in Grosvenor Square?

Titmouse was soon on his way towards that at once desired and dreaded region. He gazed with a look of occasional pity and contempt, as he passed along, at the plebeian pedestrians, and the lines of shops on each side of the narrow streets, till he began to perceive indications of superior modes of existence; when, however, he began to feel a little fidgety and nervous. The streets grew wider, the squares greater, hackney coaches (unsightly objects!) became fewer and fewer, giving place to splendid vehicles, coaches, and chariots, with one, two, and even three footmen clustering behind, with long canes, with cockades, with shoulder-knots; crimson, yellow, blue, green hammercloths, with burnished crests upon them, and sleek coachmen with wigs and three-cornered hats, and horses that pawed the ground with very pride; ladies within, glistening in satin, lace and jewels—their lords beside them, leaning back with countenances so stern and haughty; oh, by all that was magnificent! Titmouse felt himself getting now within the very vortex of greatness and fashion, and experienced a frequent fluttering and catching of the breath, and an indefinite distressing apprehension. He was, however, now in for it—and there was no retreat. As he neared Grosvenor Square, he heard, ever and anon, terrific thundering noises at the doors opposite which these splendid vehicles drew up—as if the impatient footmen were infuriated because the doors did not fly open of themselves, at the sound of the approaching carriage-wheels. At length he entered Grosvenor Square, that “pure empyrean” of earthly greatness. Carriages rolled haughtily past him, others dashed desperately in different directions. At each side of Lord Dreddlington’s house, were carriages setting down with tremendous uproar. Mr. Titmouse felt his colour going, and his heart began to beat much faster than usual. ’Twas quite in vain that he “hemmed” two or three times, by way of trying to reassure himself: he felt that his hour was come; and would have been glad at the moment for any decent excuse for driving off home again, and putting off the evil day a little longer. Opposite the dreaded door had now drawn up Mr. Titmouse’s glass coach; and the decent coachman—whose well-worn hat, and long, clean, but threadbare blue coat, and ancient-looking topboots, bespoke their wearer’s thriftiness—slowly alighting, threw the reins on to his quiet horses’ backs, and gave a modest *rat-tat-tat-tat* at the door without ringing.

“What name shall I give, sir?” said he, returning to his coach, and letting down the loud clanking steps, with a noise for which Titmouse could have heartily kicked him. “Titmouse—Mr. Titmouse,” replied he hurriedly, as the lofty door was thrown open by the corpulent porter, disclosing several footmen, with powdered heads, standing in the hall waiting for him. “Mr. Titmouse!” exclaimed the coachman to the servants: then, addressing again his flustered fare—“When shall I come back for you, sir?” “D— me, sir—don’t bother me,” faltered Titmouse; and the next moment he was in the hands of the Philistines—the door was closed upon him.

All his presence of mind had evaporated; the excellent lessons given him by Mr. Gammon, had disappeared like breath upon the polished mirror. Though Lord Dreddlington’s servants had never before seen in the house so strange an object as poor little Titmouse, they were of far too highly polished manners to appear to notice anything unusual. They silently motioned him up-stairs with a bland courteous air, he carrying his little agate-headed cane in one hand, and his new hat in the other. A gentlemanly person in a full black dress suit, opened the drawing-room door for him, with an elegant inclination which

Titmouse very gracefully returned. A faint mist seemed to be in the drawing-room for a second or two; quickly clearing away, however, Titmouse beheld, at the upper end, but two figures, that of an old gentleman and a young lady—in fact, the Earl of Dreddlington and Lady Cecilia. Now, that great man had not been a whit behindhand, in the matter of dress, with the little creature now trembling before him; being, in truth, full as anxious to make an effective first appearance in the eyes of Titmouse, as he in those of the Earl of Dreddlington. And each had succeeded in his way. There was little or no substantial difference between them. The Right Honourable the Earl of Dreddlington was an old experienced fool, and Tittlebat Titmouse a young inexperienced one. They were the same species of plant, but had grown in different soils. The one had had to struggle through a neglected existence by the dusty, hard, roadside of life; the other had had all the advantage of hothouse cultivation—its roots striking deep into, and thriving upon, the rich manure of sycophancy and adulation!—We have seen how anxious was our little friend to appear as became the occasion, before his great kinsman; who, in his turn, had several times during the day exulted secretly in the anticipation of the impression which must be produced upon the mind of Titmouse by the sudden display, in the Earl's person, of the sublimest distinctions which society can bestow, short of royalty. It had once or twice occurred to the Earl, whether he could find any fair excuse for appearing in his full general's uniform; but on maturer reflection, governed by that simplicity and severity of taste which ever distinguished him, he abandoned that idea, and appeared in a plain blue coat, white waistcoat, and black knee-breeches. But on his left breast glittered one or two foreign orders, and across his waistcoat was the broad red riband of the Bath. His hair was white and fine; his cold blue eye and haughty lip gave him an expression of severe dignity: and he stood erect as an arrow. Lady Cecilia reclined on the sofa, with an air of languor and *ennui* that had become habitual to her; and was dressed in glistening white satin, with a necklace of large and very beautiful pearls. The Earl was standing in an attitude of easy grace to receive his guest, as to whose figure and height, by the way, he was quite in the dark—Mr. Titmouse might be a great or a little man, and forward or bashful, and require a corresponding demeanour and address on the part of the Earl. "Ah, my God!" involuntarily exclaimed Lord Dreddlington to himself, the instant his eye caught sight of Titmouse, who approached slowly, making profound and formal obeisances. The Earl stood rooted to the spot he had occupied when Titmouse entered. If his servants had turned an ape into the drawing-room, the Earl could scarcely have felt or exhibited greater amazement than he now experienced for a moment. "Ah, my God!" thought he, "what a fool have we here? what creature is this?" Then it flashed across his mind;—"May this be THE FUTURE LORD DRELLINCOURT?" He was on the point of recoiling from his suddenly discovered kinsman in dismay (as for Lady Cecilia, she gazed at him, through the glass, in silent horror, after a faint exclamation, on his first becoming visible, of "gracious! Papa!"), when his habitual self-command came to his assistance; and, advancing very slowly a step or two towards Titmouse,—who, after a hurried glance around him, saw no place to deposit his hat and cane upon except the floor, on which he accordingly dropped them,—the Earl extended his hand, slightly compressed the tips of Titmouse's fingers, and bowed courteously, but with infinite concern in his features.

"I am happy, Mr. Titmouse, to make your acquaintance," said the Earl slowly—"Sir, I have the honour to present you to my daughter, the Lady Cecilia." Titmouse, who had by this time got into a sort of cold sweat—a condition from which the Earl was really not *very* far removed—made a very profound and formal bow (he had been taking lessons from a posture-master to

one of the theatres), first to the Earl, and then to Lady Cecilia, who rose about two inches from the sofa, and then sank again upon it, without removing her eyes from the figure of Titmouse, who went on bowing, first to the one and then to the other, till the Earl had engaged him in conversation.

"It gives me pleasure, sir, to see that you are punctual in your engagements. I am so too, sir; and owe no small portion of my success in life to it. Punctuality, sir, in small matters, leads to punctuality in great matters." This was said in a very deliberate and pompous manner.

"Oh yes, my lord! quite so, your lordship," stammered Titmouse, suddenly recollecting a part of Gammon's instructions; "to be sure—wouldn't have been behind time, your lordship, for a minute, my lord; uncommon bad manners, if it please your lordship——"

"Will you be seated, sir?" interrupted the Earl, deliberately motioning him to a chair, and then sitting down beside him; after which the Earl seemed, for a second or two, to forget himself, staring in silence at Titmouse, and then in consternation at Lady Cecilia. "I—I—" said he, suddenly recollecting himself, "beg your par—sir, I mean I congratulate you upon your recent success. Sir, it must have been rather a surprise to you?"

"Oh yes, sir—my lord, most uncommon, may it please your lordship—particular—but *right is right*—please your lordship——"

"[Oh Heavens! merciful Heavens! How horrid is all this! Am I awake or only dreaming? 'Tis an idiot—and what's worse, a *vulgar* idiot. My God! *And this thing may be Lord Drelincourt.*" This was what was passing through Lord Dreddlington's mind, while his troubled eye was fixed upon Titmouse].

"It is, indeed, Mr. Titmouse," replied his lordship, "very true; sir, what you say is correct. Quite so; exactly." His eye was fixed on Titmouse, but his words were uttered, as it were, mechanically, and in a musing manner. It flitted for a moment across his mind, whether he should ring the bell, and order the servant to show out of the house the fearful imp that had just been shown into it; but at that critical moment he detected poor Titmouse's eye fixed with a kind of reverent intensity upon his lordship's glittering orders. 'Twas a lucky look that for Titmouse, for it began to melt away the ice that was getting round the little heart of his august relative. 'Twas evident that the poor young man had not been accustomed to society, thought the Earl, with an approach towards the compassionate mood. He was frightfully dressed, to be sure; and as for his speech, he was manifestly overawed by the presence in which he found himself; [that thought melted a little more of the ice.] Yet, was it not evident that he had *some* latent power of appreciating real distinction when he beheld it? [the little heart here lost *all* the ice that had begun so suddenly to encrust it.] And again;—he has actually thrust out the intolerable Aubrey, and is now lawful owner of Yatton—of *ten thousand a-year*——

"Did you see the review to-day, sir?" inquired the Earl, rather blandly. "His Majesty was there, sir, and seemed to enjoy the scene." Titmouse, with a timid air, said that he had not seen it, as he had been upon the river: and after a few more general observations—"Will you permit me, sir? It is from a *quarter* requiring the highest—a-hem!" said the Earl, as a note was brought him, which he immediately opened and read. Lady Cecilia also appearing engaged reading, Titmouse had a moment's breathing time and interval of relief. What would he have given, he thought, for some other person, or several persons, to come in and divide the attention—the intolerably oppressive attention of the two august individuals then before him! He seized the opportunity to cast a furtive glance around the room. It opened into a second, which opened into a third: how spacious each and lofty! And glittering glass chandeliers in each!

What chimney and pier glasses! What rich crimson satin curtains—they must have cost twelve or fourteen shillings a-yard at least!—The carpets, of the finest Brussels—and they felt like velvet to the feet;—then the brackets, of marble and gold, with snowy statues and vases glistening upon each; chairs so delicate, and gilded all over—he almost feared to sit down on them. What would the Quirks and Tag-rags think of this! Faugh—only to think for a moment of Alibi House and Satin Lodge!—Then there was the Lady Cecilia—a lady of high rank! How rich her dress—and how haughtily beautiful she looked as she reclined upon the sofa [she was in fact busy conning over the new opera, coming out the next evening]. And the Earl of Dreddlington—there he was, reading, doubtless, some letter from the King or one of the royal family—a man of great rank—resplendent in his decorations—all just as he had seen in pictures, and heard and read of—what must that red riband have cost? [Ay, indeed, poor Lord Dreddlington, it had cost you the labour of half a life of steadfast sycophancy, of watchful manœuvring, and desperate exertion! And at last, the minister tossed it to you in a moment of disgust and despair—mortally perplexed by the conflicting claims of two sulky Dukes and a querulous old Marquis, each of whom threatened to withdraw his “*influence and support*,” if his *rival's* claims were preferred!] He had never seen any of such a breadth.—It must have been manufactured on purpose for the Earl!—How white were his hands! And he had an antique massive signet-ring on his forefinger, and two glittering rings at least on each of his little fingers—positively Titmouse at length began to regard him almost as a god:—and yet the amazing thought occurred that this august being was allied to him by the ties of relationship!

Such were the thoughts and reflections passing through the mind of Titmouse, during the time that Lord Dreddlington was engaged in reading his letter—and afterwards during the brief intervals which elapsed between the various observations addressed to him by his lordship.

The gentleman in black at length entered the room, and, advancing slowly and noiselessly towards the Earl, said, in a quiet manner, “Dinner, my Lord;” and retired. Into what new scenes of splendid embarrassment was this the signal for Mr. Titmouse’s introduction? thought our friend, and trembled.

“Mr. Titmouse, will you give your arm to the Lady Cecilia?” said the Earl, motioning him to the sofa. Up jumped Titmouse, and approached hastily the recumbent beauty, who languidly arose, arranging her train with one hand, and with the other, having drawn on her glove, just barely touched the proffered arm of Titmouse, extended towards her at a very acute angle, and at right angles with his own body—stammering, “Honour to take your ladyship—uncommon proud—this way, my lady.”—Lady Cecilia took no more notice of him than if he had been a dumb waiter, walking beside him in silence—the Earl following. To think that a nobleman of high rank was walking *behind* him!

Would to heaven, thought the embarrassed Titmouse, that he had two fronts, one for the Earl behind, and the other to be turned full towards Lady Cecilia! The tall servants, powdered and in light blue liveries, stood like a guard of honour around the dining-room door. That room was extensive and lofty: what a solitary sort of state were they about to dine in! Titmouse felt cold though it was summer, and trembled as he followed, rather than led, his haughty partner to her seat; and then was motioned into his own by the Earl, himself sitting down opposite a chased silver soup tureen! A servant stood behind Lady Cecilia and Titmouse; also on the left of the Earl, while on his right, between his lordship and the glistening sideboard, stood a portly gentleman in black with a bald head and somewhat haughty countenance. Though Titmouse had touched nothing since breakfast, he felt not the slightest

inclination to eat, and would have given the world to have dared to say as much, and be at once relieved from a vast deal of anxiety. Is it indeed easy to conceive of a fellow-creature in a state of more complete thralldom, at that moment, than poor little Titmouse? A little animal under the suddenly exhausted receiver of an air pump, or a fish just plucked out of its own element, and flung gasping and struggling upon the grass, may serve to assist your conceptions of the position and sufferings of Mr. Titmouse. The Earl, who was on the look-out for it, observed his condition with secret but complete satisfaction; here he beheld the legitimate effect of rank and state upon the human mind. Titmouse got through the soup—of which about half-a-dozen spoonfuls only were put into his plate—pretty fairly. Anywhere else than at Lord Dreddlington's, Titmouse would have thought it thin watery stuff with a few green things chopped up and swimming in it; but now he perceived that it had a sort of superior flavour. How some red mullet, enclosed in paper, puzzled poor Titmouse, is best known to himself.

"The Lady Cecilia will take wine with you, Mr. Titmouse. I dare say,—” observed the Earl; and in a moment's time, but with perfect deliberation, the servants poured wine into the two glasses. "Your ladyship's health, my lady—" faltered Titmouse. She slightly bowed, and a faint smile glimmered at the corners of her mouth—but unobserved by Titmouse. "I think you said, Mr. Titmouse," quoth the Earl, some time afterwards, "that you had not yet taken possession of Yatton?" "No, my lord; but I go down the day after to-morrow—quite—if I may say it, my lord—quite in style—" answered Titmouse, in a style of humble and hesitating jocularity. "Ha, ha!"—exclaimed the Earl gently.

"Had you any acquaintance with the Aubreys, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired the Lady Cecilia. "No, my lady—yes, your ladyship (I beg your ladyship's pardon)—but, now I think of it, I had a slight acquaintance with Miss Aubrey." [Titmouse, Titmouse, you little wretch, how dare you say so?] "She is considered pretty in the country, I believe," drawled Lady Cecilia languidly. "Oh, most uncommon lovely!—*middling*, only middling, my lady, I should say"—added Titmouse suddenly; having observed, as he fancied, rather a displeased look in Lady Cecilia. He had begun his sentence with more energy than he had yet shown in the house; but finished it hastily, and coloured as he spoke—feeling that he had somehow committed himself.

"Do you form a new establishment at Yatton, sir?" inquired the Earl, "or take to any part of that of your predecessor?" "I have not, please your lordship, made up my mind yet exactly—should like to know your lordship's opinion." "Why, sir, I should be governed by circumstances—by circumstances, sir; when you get there, sir, you will be better able to judge of the course you should pursue."

"Do you intend, Mr. Titmouse, to live in town, or in the country?" inquired Lady Cecilia. "A little of both, my lady—but mostly in town; because, as your ladyship sees, the country is *devilish* dull—'pon my life, my lady—my lord—beg a thousand pardons," he added, bowing to both, and blushing violently. Here he *had* committed himself; but his august companions bowed to him very kindly, and he presently recovered his self-possession.

"Are you fond of hunting, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired the Earl. "Why, my lord, can't exactly say that I am—but your lordship sees, cases *alter* circumstances, and when I get down there among the country gents, p'raps I may do as they do, my lord."

"I presume, Mr. Titmouse, you have scarcely chosen a town residence yet?" inquired Lady Cecilia. "No, my lady—not fixed it yet—was thinking of taking Mr. Aubrey's house in Grosvenor Street, understanding it is to be sold;" then turning towards the Earl—"because, as your lordship sees, I was thinking of

getting into *both* the nests of the old birds, while both are warm"—he added, with a very faint smile.

"Exactly; yes—I see, sir—I understand you," replied Lord Dreddlington, sipping his wine. His manner rather discomposed Titmouse, to whom it then very naturally occurred that the Earl might be warmly attached to the Aubreys, and not relish their being spoken of so lightly; so Titmouse hastily and anxiously added—"your lordship sees I was most *particular* sorry to make the Aubreys turn out. A most uncommon respectable gent, Mr. Aubrey; I assure your lordship I think so."

"I had not the honour of his acquaintance, sir," replied the Earl coldly, and with exceeding stiffness, which flustered Titmouse not a little; and a pause occurred in the conversation for a minute or two. Dinner had now considerably advanced, and Titmouse was beginning to grow a *little* familiar with the routine of matters. Remembering Gammon's caution concerning the wine, and also observing how very little was drunk by the Earl and Lady Cecilia, Titmouse did the same; and during the whole of dinner had scarcely three full glasses of wine.

"How long is it," inquired the Earl, addressing his daughter, "since they took that house?" Lady Cecilia could not say. "Stay—now I recollect—surely it was just before my appointment to the Household. Yes; it was about that time, I now recollect. I am alluding, Mr. Titmouse," continued the Earl, addressing him in a very gracious manner, "to an appointment under the Crown of some little distinction, which I was solicited to accept, at the personal instance of his Majesty, on the occasion of our party coming into power—I mean that of Lord Steward of the Household."

"Dear me, my lord! Indeed! Only to think, your lordship!" exclaimed Titmouse, with infinite deference in his manner, which encouraged the Earl to proceed.

"That sir, was an office of great importance, and I had some hesitation in undertaking its responsibility. But, sir, when I had once committed myself to my sovereign and my country, I resolved to give them my best services. I had formed plans for effecting very extensive alterations, sir, in that department of the public service, which I have no doubt would have given great satisfaction to the country as soon as the nature of my intentions became generally understood; when faction, sir, unfortunately prevailed, and we were compelled to relinquish office."

"Dear me, my lord! How particular sorry I am to hear it, my lord!" exclaimed Titmouse, as he gazed at the baffled statesman with an expression of respectful sympathy. "Sir, it gives me sincere satisfaction," said the Earl, after a pause, "to hear that our political opinions agree——" "Oh yes! my lord, quite; *sure* of that——" "I assure you, sir, that some little acquaintance with the genius and spirit of the British constitution has satisfied me that this country can never be safely or advantageously governed except on sound Whig principles."—He paused. "Yes, my lord; it's quite true, your lordship—" interposed Titmouse, reverentially. "That, sir, is the only way I know of by which aristocratic institutions can be brought to bear effectively upon, to blend harmoniously with, the interests of the lower orders—the people, Mr. Titmouse."

Titmouse thought this wonderfully fine, and sat listening as to an oracle of political wisdom. The Earl, observing it, began to form a much higher opinion of his little kinsman. "The unfortunate gentleman, your predecessor at Yatton, sir, if he had but allowed himself to have been guided by those who had mixed in public affairs before he was born," said the Earl with great dignity,——

"Pon my word, my lord, he was, I've heard, a d——d Tory!—Oh my lady! my lord! humbly beg pardon," he added, turning pale; but the fatal word

had been uttered, and heard by both; and he felt as if he could have sunk through the floor.

"Shall I have the honour of taking another glass of wine with you, sir?" inquired the Earl, rather gravely and severely, as if wishing Mr. Titmouse fully to appreciate the fearful breach of etiquette of which he had just been guilty. After they had bowed to each other, a very awkward pause occurred, which was at length broken by the considerate Lady Cecilia.

"Are you fond of the opera, Mr. Titmouse?" "Very, my lady—most particular," replied Titmouse who had been there once only. "Do you prefer the opera, or the ballet? I mean the music or the dancing?" "Oh, I understand, your ladyship. 'Pon my word, my lady, I prefer them both. The dancing is most uncommon superior; though I must say, my lady, the lady dancers there do most uncommonly—*rather*, I should say"—He stopped abruptly; his face flushed, and he felt as if he had burst into a perspiration. What the deuce was he about? It seemed as if some devil within were urging him on, from time to time, to commit himself. Good gracious! another word, and out would have come his opinion as to the shocking indecency of the ballet!

"I understand you, sir; I quite agree with you," said Lady Cecilia calmly; "the ballet *does* come on at a sad late hour; I often wish they would now and then have the ballet first." "'Pon my life, my lady," quoth Titmouse, eagerly snatching at the plank that was thrown to him; "that *is* what I meant—nothing else, upon my soul, your ladyship." "Do you intend taking a box there, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired her ladyship, with an appearance of interest in the expected answer. "Why, your ladyship, they say a box there is a *precious* long figure;—but in course, my lady, when I've got to rights a little with my property—your ladyship understands—I shall do the correct thing."

Here a very long pause ensued. How dismally quiet and deliberate was everything! The very servants, how noiselessly they waited! Everything done just when it was wanted, yet no hurry, or bustle, or noise; and they looked so composed—so much at their ease. He fancied that they had scarce anything else to do than look at him, and watch all his movements, which greatly embarrassed him, and he began to *hate* them. He tried hard to inspire himself with a reflection upon his own suddenly acquired and really great personal importance; absolute master of Ten Thousand a-Year, a relation of the great man at whose table he sat, and whose hired servants they were; but then his timorously raised eye would light, for an instant, upon the splendid *insignia* of the Earl; and he felt as oppressed as ever. What would he not have given for a few minutes' interval and sense of complete freedom and independence? And were these to be his feelings ever hereafter? Was this the sort of tremulous apprehension of offence, and embarrassment as to his every move, to which he was to be doomed in high life? Oh that he had but been *born* to it, like the Earl and the Lady Cecilia!

"Were you ever in the House of Lords, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired Lord Dreddlington suddenly, after casting about for some little time for a topic on which he might converse with Titmouse. "No, my lord, never—should most uncommon like to see it, my lord"—replied Titmouse eagerly. "Certainly, it is an impressive spectacle, sir, and well worth seeing." "I suppose, my lord, your lordship goes there every day?" "Why, sir, I believe *I am* pretty punctual in my attendance. I was there to-day, sir, till the House rose. Sir, I am of opinion that hereditary legislators—a practical anomaly in a free state like this—but one which has innumerable unperceived advantages to recommend it—sir, our country expects at our hands, in discharge of so grave a trust—in short, if we were not to be true to—we who are in a peculiar sense the guardians of public liberty—if we were once to betray our trust—Let me

trouble you, sir, for a little—of that —,” said the Earl, using some foreign word which Titmouse had never heard of before, and looking towards a delicately constructed fabric, as of compressed snow, that stood before Titmouse. A servant stood in a twinkling beside him with his lordship’s plate. Ah me! that I should have to relate so sad an event as presently occurred to Titmouse! He took a spoon; and imagining the glistening fabric before him to be as solid as it looked, brought to bear upon it an adequate degree of force, even as if he had been going to scoop out a piece of Stilton cheese—and inserting his spoon at the summit of the snowy and deceitful structure, souse to the bottom went spoon, hand, coat-cuff and all, and a very dismal noise evidenced that the dish on which the spoon had descended with so much force—was no longer a dish. It was, in fact broken in halves, and the liquid from within ran about on the cloth. * * * A cluster of servants was quickly around him. * * * A mist came over his eyes; the colour deserted his cheek; and he had a strange feeling, as if verily the end of all things was at hand.

“I beg you will think nothing of it—it really signifies nothing at all, Mr. Titmouse,” said the Earl kindly, observing his agitation. “Oh dear? Oh my lord—your ladyship—what an *uncommon* stupid ass!” “Pray *don’t* distress yourself, Mr. Titmouse,” said Lady Cecilia, really feeling for his evident misery, “or you will distress *us*.” “I beg—humbly beg pardon—please your lordship—your ladyship. I’ll replace it with the best in London the first thing in the morning.” Here the servant beside him, who was arranging the table-cloth, uttered a faint sound of suppressed laughter, which disconcerted Titmouse still more.

“Give yourself no concern—’tis only a *trifle*, Mr. Titmouse!—You understand, ha, ha!” said the Earl kindly. “But if your lordship will only allow me—expense is no object. I know the very best shop in Oxford Street——”

“Suppose we take a glass of champagne together, Mr. Titmouse!” said the Earl rather peremptorily; and Titmouse had sense enough to be aware that he was to drop the subject. It was a good while before he recovered even the little degree of self-possession which he had had since first entering Lord Dreddlington’s house. He had afterwards no very distinct recollection of the manner in which he got through the rest of dinner, but a general sense of his having been treated with the most kind and delicate forbearance—no *fuss* made. Suppose such an accident had occurred at *Satin Lodge*, or even *Alibi House*!

Shortly after the servants had withdrawn, Lady Cecilia rose to retire. Titmouse, seeing the Earl approaching the bell, anticipated him in ringing it, and then darted to the door with the speed of a lamplighter to open it, as he did, just before a servant had raised his hand to it on the outside. Then he stood within, and the servant without, each bowing, and Lady Cecilia passed between them with stately step, her eyes fixed upon the ground, and her lips compressed, with the effort to check her inclination to a smile—perhaps, even laughter. Titmouse was now left alone with Lord Dreddlington; and, on resuming his seat, most earnestly renewed his entreaties to be allowed to replace the dish which he had broken, assuring Lord Dreddlington that “money was no object at all.” He was encountered, however, with so stern a negative by his lordship, that, with a hurried apology, he dropped the subject; the Earl, however, good-naturedly added, that he had perceived the *joke* intended by Mr. Titmouse—which was certainly a very good one! This would have set off poor Titmouse again; but a glance at the face of his magnificent host sealed his lips.

“I have heard it said, Mr. Titmouse,” presently commenced the Earl, “that you have been engaged in mercantile pursuits during the period of your exclusion from the estates which you have just recovered. Is it so, sir?”

"Ye-e-e-s—sir—my lord—" replied Titmouse, hastily considering whether or not he should altogether *sink the shop*; but he dared hardly venture upon so very decisive a lie—"I was, please your lordship, in one of the greatest establishments in the mercery line in London—at the west end, my lord; most confidential, my lord; management of everything; but, somehow, my lord, I never *took to it*—your lordship understands?"

"Perfectly, sir; I can quite appreciate your feelings. But, sir, the mercantile interests of this great country are not to be overlooked. Those who are concerned in them, are frequently respectable persons."

"Begging pardon, my lord—no, they a'n't—if your lordship only knew them as well as I do, my lord. Most uncommon low people. Do anything to turn a penny, my lord; and often sell damaged goods for best."

"It is very possible, sir, that there may exist irregularities, *eccentricities*, ha! ha! of that description; but upon the whole, sir, I am disposed to think that there are many very decent persons engaged in trade. I have had the happiness, sir, to assist in passing measures that were calculated, by removing restrictions and protective duties, to secure to this country the benefits of free and universal competition. We have been proceeding, sir, for many years, on altogether a wrong principle; but, not to follow out this matter further, I must remind you, sir, that your acquaintance with the principles and leading details of mercantile transactions—undoubtedly one of the mainsprings of the national greatness—may hereafter be of use to you, sir."

"Yes, my lord, 'pon my soul—when I'm furnishing my houses in town and country, I mean to go to market myself—please your lordship, I know a trick or two of the trade, and can't be taken in, my lord. For instance, my lord, there's Tag-rag—a-hem! hem!" he paused abruptly, and looked somewhat confusedly at the Earl.

"I did not mean *that* exactly," said his lordship, unable to resist a smile. "Pray, fill your glass, Mr. Titmouse." He did so. "You are of course aware that you have the absolute patronage of the borough of Yatton, Mr. Titmouse?—it occurs to me, that as our political opinions agree, and unless I am presumptuous, sir, in so thinking—I may be regarded, in a political point of view, as the head of the family—you understand me, I hope, Mr. Titmouse?" "Exactly, my lord—'pon my soul, it's all correct, my lord." "Well—then, sir—the family interests, Mr. Titmouse, must be looked after—" "Oh! in course, my lord, only too happy—certainly, my lord, we shall I hope, make a very *interesting* family, if your lordship so pleases—I *can* have no objection, my lord!" "It was a vile, a disgraceful trick, by which Ministers popped in their own man for our borough, Mr. Titmouse."

[Lord Dreddlington alluded to the circumstance of a new writ having been moved for, immediately on Mr. Aubrey's acceptance of the Chiltern Hundreds, and, before the Opposition could be prepared for such a step, sent down without delay to Yatton, and Sir Percival Pickering, Bart., of Luddington Court, an intimate friend of Mr. Aubrey's, and a keen unflinching Tory, being returned as member, before the Titmouse influence could be brought for even one moment in the field; the few and willing electors of that ancient and loyal borough being only too happy to have the opportunity of voting for a man whose principles they approved—probably the last opportunity they would have of doing so.]

"Yes, my lord—Sir what-d'y-e-call-him *was* a trifle too sharp for us, in that business, wasn't he?"

"It has succeeded, sir, for the moment, but"—continued his lordship in a very significant and stately manner—"it is quite possible that their triumph may be of short duration—Mr. Titmouse. Those who, like myself, are at headquarters—let me see you fill your glass, Mr. Titmouse.—I have the honour to

congratulate you, sir, on the recovery of your rights, and to wish you health and long life in the enjoyment of them," quoth the Earl with an air of the loftiest urbanity.

"May it please your lordship, your lordship's most uncommon polite"—commenced Titmouse, rising and standing while he spoke—for he had had experience enough of society, to be aware that when a gentleman's health is drunk on important occasions, it becomes him to rise and acknowledge the compliment in such language as he can command—"and am particularly proud—a—a—I beg to propose, my lord, your lordship's very *superior* good health, and many thanks." Then he sat down; each poured out another glass of claret, and Titmouse drank his off.

"It is extremely singular, sir," said the Earl musingly, after a considerable pause, "the reverses in life that one hears of!" [I cannot help pausing, for a moment, to suggest—what must have become of the Earl and his daughter, had they been placed in the situation of the unfortunate Aubreys.] "Yes, my lord, your lordship's quite true, 'pon my word!—Most uncommon *ups* and *downs*! Lord, my lord, only to fancy *me* a few months ago, trotting up and down Oxford Street with my yard mea—" He stopped short, and coloured violently.

"Well, sir," replied the Earl, with an expression of bland and dignified sympathy—"however humble might have been your circumstances, it is a consolation to reflect that *the Fates ordained it*. Sir, there is nothing dishonourable in being poor, when—you cannot help it! Reverses of fortune, sir, have happened to some of the greatest characters in our history. You remember Alfred, sir!" Titmouse bowed assentingly; but had he been questioned, could have told, I suspect, as little about the matter—as the Earl himself.

"Allow me, sir, to ask whether you have come to any arrangement with your late opponent concerning the back-rents?" inquired the Earl, with a great appearance of interest. "No, my lord, not yet: but my solicitors say they'll soon *have the screw on*, please your lordship—that's just what they say—their very words." "Indeed, sir!" replied the Earl gravely. "What is the sum to which they say you are entitled, sir?"

"Sixty thousand pounds, my lord, at least—quite set me up at starting, my lord," replied Titmouse with great glee; but the Earl shuddered involuntarily for a moment, and sipped his wine in silence.

"By the way, Mr. Titmouse," said he, after a considerable pause—"I trust you will forgive me for suggesting whether it would not be a prudent step for you to go to one of the universities for at least a twelvemonth—"

"Humbly begging your lordship's pardon, am not I too old? I've heard they're all a pack of overgrown school-boys there—and learn nothing but a bit of some old languages that a'n't the least use now-a-days, seeing it a'n't *spoke* now, anywhere"—replied Titmouse—"Besides, I've talked the thing over with Mr. Gammon, my lord—" "Mr. Gammon? Allow me, sir, to ask who that may be?" "One of my solicitors, my lord; a most remarkable clever man, and an out-and-out lawyer, my lord. It was he that found out all about my case, my lord. If your lordship was only to see him for a moment, your lordship would say what a *remarkable* clever man that is!"

"You will forgive my curiosity, sir—but it must have surely required very ample means to have carried on so arduous a lawsuit as that which has just terminated so successfully?"

"Oh yes, my lord!—Quirk, Gammon, and Snap did all that; and, between me and your lordship, I suppose I shall have to come down a pretty long figure, all on the *nail*, as your lordship understands; but I mean them to get it all out of that respectable gent, Mr. Aubrey."

By quietly pressing his questions, the Earl got a good deal more out of Titmouse than he was aware of, concerning Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and conceived a special dislike for Gammon. The Earl gave him some pretty decisive hints about the necessity of being on his guard with such people—and hoped that he would not commit himself to anything important without consulting his lordship, who would of course give him the advantage of his experience in the affairs of the world, and open his eyes to the designs of those whose only object was to make a prey of him. Titmouse began to feel that here at length, he had met with a *real* friend—one whose suggestions were worthy of being received with the profoundest deference. Soon afterwards, he had the good fortune to please the Earl beyond expression, by venturing timidly to express his admiration of the splendid riband worn by his lordship; who took the opportunity of explaining that and the other marks of distinction he wore, and others which he was entitled to wear, at great length and with much minuteness—so as that he at length caused Titmouse to believe that he, Lord Dreddlinton—the august head of the family—must have rendered more signal service, somehow or other, to his country, and also done more to win the admiration and gratitude of foreign countries, than most men living. His lordship might not, perhaps, have intended it; but he went on till he had almost DEIFIED himself, in the estimation of his little listener!—One very natural question was perpetually trembling on the tip of Titmouse's tongue; *viz.*, how and when he could get such things for *himself*.

"Well, Mr. Titmouse," at length observed the Earl, after looking at his watch—"shall we adjourn to the drawing-room? The fact is, sir, that Lady Cecilia and I have an evening engagement at the Duchess of Diamond's. I much regret being unable to take you with us, sir; but, as it is, shall we rejoin the Lady Cecilia?" continued his lordship, rising. Up jumped Titmouse; and the Earl and he were soon in the drawing-room, where, besides the Lady Cecilia, sat another lady, to whom he was not introduced in any way. This was Miss Macspleuchan, a distant connection of the Earl's late countess—a very poor relation, who had entered the house of the Earl of Dreddlinton, in order to eat the *bitter, bitter bread of dependence*. Poor soul! you might tell, by a glance at her, that she did not thrive upon it. She was about thirty, and so thin! She was dressed in plain white muslin; and there were a manifest constraint and timidity about her motions, and a depression in her countenance, whose lineaments showed that if she could be happy she might be handsome. She had a most ladylike air; and there were thought in her brow and acuteness in her eye, which, however, as it were, habitually watched the motions of the Earl and the Lady Cecilia with deference and anxiety. Poor Miss Macspleuchan felt herself gradually sinking into a sycophant; the alternative being that or starvation. She was very accomplished, particularly in music and languages, while the Lady Cecilia really knew scarcely anything—for which reason, principally, she had long ago conceived a bitter dislike to Miss Macspleuchan, and inflicted on her a number of petty but exquisite mortifications and indignities; such, perhaps, as none but a sensitive soul could appreciate, for the Earl and his daughter were exemplary persons in the proprieties of life, and would not do such things *openly*. She was a sort of companion of Lady Cecilia, and entirely dependent upon her and the Earl for her subsistence. She was sitting on the sofa, beside Lady Cecilia, when Titmouse re-entered the drawing-room; and Lady Cecilia eyed him through her glass with infinite *nonchalance*, even when he had advanced to within a few feet of her. He made her, as she rose to take her seat and prepare tea, a most obsequious bow; absurd as was the style of its performance, Miss Macspleuchan saw that there was politeness in the intention; 'twas moreover a courtesy towards herself that was unusual from the Earl's guests; and these considerations served to

take off the edge of the ridicule and contempt with which Lady Cecilia had been preparing her to receive their newly discovered kinsman. After standing for a second or two near the sofa, Titmouse ventured to sit himself down upon it—on the very edge only—as if afraid of disturbing Lady Cecilia, who was reclining on it with an air of languid hauteur.

"So you're going, my lady, to a dance to-night, as my lord says?" quoth Titmouse respectfully; "hope your ladyship will enjoy yourself!" "We regret that you do not accompany us, Mr. Titmouse," said Lady Cecilia, slightly inclining towards him, and glancing at Miss Macspleuchan with a faint and bitter smile.

"Should have been most uncommon proud to have gone, your ladyship," replied Titmouse, as a servant brought him a cup of tea. "These cups and saucers, my lady, come from abroad, I suppose? Now, I dare say, though they've *rather* a funny look, they cost a good deal?" "I really do not know, sir; we have had them a very long while." "Pon my life, my lady, I like them amazing!" Seeing her ladyship not disposed to talk, Titmouse became silent.

"Are you fond of music, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired the Earl, presently observing the pause in the conversation to become embarrassing to Titmouse. "Very, indeed, my lord: is your lordship?" "I am rather fond of vocal music, sir—of the opera."

This the Earl said, because Miss Macspleuchan played upon the piano very brilliantly, and did not sing. Miss Macspleuchan understood him.

"Do you play upon any instrument, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired Lady Cecilia, with a smile lurking about her lips, which increased a little when Titmouse replied in the negative, that he had once begun to learn the clarinet some years ago, but could not manage the notes. "Excuse me, my lady, but what an uncommon fine piano that is!" said he.—"If I may make so bold, will your ladyship give us a tune?" "I dare say, Miss Macspleuchan will play for you, Mr. Titmouse, if you wish it," replied Lady Cecilia, coldly.

Some time afterwards, a servant announced to her ladyship and the Earl that the carriage was at the door; and presently they both retired to their dressing-rooms to make some slight alteration in their dress;—the Earl to add a foreign order or two, and Lady Cecilia to place upon her haughty brow a small tiara of brilliants. As soon as they had thus retired—"I shall feel great pleasure, sir, in playing for you, if you wish it?" said Miss Macspleuchan, in a voice of such mingled melancholy and kindness as must have gone to Titmouse's heart, if he had possessed one. He jumped up, and bowed profoundly. She sat down to the piano, and played with great ease and brilliancy such music as she supposed would suit her auditor—namely, waltzes and marches—till the door opened, and Lady Cecilia reappeared, drawing on her gloves, with the glittering addition which I have mentioned—followed presently by the Earl.

"Well, sir," said he, with dignified affability, "I need not repeat how highly gratified I feel at our introduction to each other. I trust you will henceforth consider yourself no stranger here —"

"Oh, 'pon my life, my lord!" exclaimed Titmouse, in a low tone, and with a sudden and profound bow.

"And that on your return from Yorkshire," continued the Earl, drawing on his gloves, "you will let us see you: we both feel great interest in your good fortunes. Sir, I have the honour to wish you a good evening!" He extended his gloved hand to Mr. Titmouse, whose hand, however, he touched with little more than the ends of his fingers.

"We exceedingly regret that we must leave you, Mr. Titmouse," said Lady Cecilia with forced seriousness; "but as we wish to leave the duchess's early,

in order to go to another ball, we must *go* early. Good evening, sir," and having dropped him a slight formal curtsy, she quitted the drawing-room followed by the Earl, Titmouse making four or five such bows as provoked a smile from all who witnessed them. The next moment he was alone with Miss Macspleuchan. Her unaffected good-natured address made him feel more at home within the next five minutes than he had been since entering that frigid scene of foolish state—since being in the oppressive presence of the greatness just departed. She felt at first a contempt for him bordering upon disgust, but which very soon melted into pity. What a wretched creature was *this* to be put into such a dazzling position! He soon got pretty communicative with her, and told her about the Tag-rags, Miss Tag-rag, and Miss Quirk, both of whom were absolutely dying of love for him, and thought he was in love with them, which was not the case—far from it. Then he hinted something about a most particular uncommon lovely gal that had his heart, and he hoped to have hers, as soon as he had got all to rights at Yatton. Then he told her of the great style in which he was going down to take possession of his estates. Having finished this, he told her that he had been the morning before to see a man hanged for murdering his wife; that he had been into the condemned cell, and then into the press-room, and had seen his hands and arms tied, and shaken hands with him; and he was going on into such a sickening minuteness of detail, that to avoid it Miss Macspleuchan, who felt both shocked and disgusted, suddenly asked him if he was fond of heraldry, and rising from the sofa, she went into the second room, where on an elegant and antique stand lay a huge roll of parchment, on a gilded stick, splendidly mounted and most superbly illuminated—it was about three-quarters of a yard in breadth, and some ten or twenty yards in length. This was the *Pedigree of the Dreddlingtons*. She was giving him an account of Simon de Drelincourt, an early ancestor of the Earl's, who had come over with William the Conqueror, and performed stupendous feats of valour at the battle of Hastings, Titmouse listening in open-mouthed wonder, and almost trembling to think that he had broken a valuable dish belonging to a nobleman who had such wonderful ancestors, not at the moment adverting to the circumstance that he was himself descended from the same ancestors, and had as rich blood in him as the Earl and Lady Cecilia—when a servant entered and informed him in a whisper that "his carriage had arrived." He considered that etiquette required him to depart immediately.

"Beg your pardon; but if ever you should come down to my estate in the country, shall be most uncommon proud to see your ladyship."

"I beg your pardon; you are mistaken, sir," interrupted Miss Macspleuchan hastily, and blushing scarlet; the fact being that Titmouse had not caught her name on its having been once or twice pronounced by Lady Cecilia, and very naturally concluding that she also must be a lady of rank. Titmouse was, however, so occupied with his efforts to make a graceful exit, that he did not catch the explanation of his mistake; and bowing almost down to the ground, reached the landing, where the tall servant, with a very easy grace, gave him his hat and cane, and preceded him downstairs. As he descended, he felt in his pockets for some loose silver, and gave several shillings between the servants who stood in the hall to witness his departure; after which, one of them having opened the door and let down the steps of the glass coach, Titmouse popped into it. "Home, sir?" inquired the servant, as he closed the door. "The Cabbage-Stalk Hotel, Covent Garden," replied Titmouse.

That was communicated to the coachman, and off rumbled the glass coach. As soon as Titmouse had become calm enough to reflect upon the events of the evening, he came to the conclusion that the Earl of Dreddlington was a very great man indeed; the Lady Cecilia very beautiful, but rather proud;

and Miss Macspleuchan (Lady Somebody, as he supposed) one of the most interesting ladies he had ever met with, something *uncommon* pleasing about her; in short, he felt a sort of grateful attachment towards her, which, how long it would have lasted after he had heard that she was only a plain miss, and a poor relative, I leave the acute reader to conjecture.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. GAMMON was with him about half-past nine o'clock the next morning, sufficiently anxious to hear how he had got on overnight. He was received by Titmouse in a manner totally different from that in which he had ever before been received by him; and concluded for a few minutes, that Lord Dreddlington had been *pumping* Titmouse, had learned from him his position with respect to him, Gammon, in particular, and had injected distrust and suspicion into the mind of Titmouse concerning him. But Gammon, with all his acuteness, was quite mistaken. The truth was, 'twas only an attempt on the part of poor Titmouse to assume the composed demeanour, the languid elegance, which he had observed in the distinguished personages with whom he had spent the preceding evening, and which had made a very deep impression on his mind. He drawled out his words, looked as if he were half asleep, and continually addressed Gammon as "Sir," and "Mr. Gammon," just as the Earl of Dreddlington had constantly addressed him—Titmouse. Our friend was sitting at breakfast, on the present occasion, in a most gaudy dressing-gown, and with the newspaper before him; in short, his personal appearance and manner were totally different from what Gammon had ever seen before, and he looked now and then at Titmouse, as if for a moment doubting his identity. Whether or not he was now on the point of throwing overboard those who had piloted him from amidst the shoals of poverty into the open sea of affluence, shone upon by the vivid sunlight of rank and distinction, Gammon did not know; but he contracted his brow, and assumed a certain sternness and peremptoriness of tone and bearing, which were not long in reducing Titmouse to his proper dimensions; and when at length Mr. Gammon entered upon the delightful subject of the morrow's expedition, telling him that he, Gammon, had now nearly completed all the preparations for going down to, and taking possession of Yatton in a style of suitable splendour, according to the wish of Titmouse—this quickly melted away the thin coating of mannerism, and Titmouse was "himself again." He immediately gave Mr. Gammon a full account of what had happened at Lord Dreddlington's, and, I fear, of a great deal more that might possibly have happened, but certainly *had* not; *e.g.*, his lordship's special laudation of Mr. Gammon as a "monstrous fine lawyer," which Titmouse swore were the very exact words of his lordship, and that "he should have been most happy to see Mr. Gammon," and a good deal to the like effect. Also that he had been "most uncommon thick" with "Lady Cicely" (so he pronounced her name); and that both she and Lord Dreddlington had "pressed him very hard" to go with them to a ball *at a duke's!* He made no mention of the broken trifle-dish; said they had nearly a dozen servants to wait on them (only three sitting down to dinner), and twenty different sorts of wine, and no end of courses, at dinner. That the Earl wore a star, and garter, and ribands—which Gammon erroneously thought as apocryphal as the rest; and had told him that he—Titmouse—might one day wear them, and sit in the House of Lords; and had, moreover, advised him most strenuously to get into Parliament as soon as possible, as

the "cause of the people wanted strengthening." [As Lord Coke somewhere says, in speaking of a spurious portion of the text of Lyttleton, "*that arrow never came out of Lyttleton's quiver*"—so Gammon instantly perceived that the last sentence came never out of Titmouse's own head, but was that of a wise and able man and statesman.]

As soon as Titmouse had finished his little romance, Gammon proceeded to the chief object of his visit—their next day's journey. He said that he much regretted to say that Mr. Snap had expressed a very anxious wish to witness the triumph of Mr. Titmouse; and that Mr. Titmouse, unless he had some particular objection—"Oh none, 'pon honour!—poor Snap!—devilish good chap in a small way!" said Titmouse; and at once gave his consent—Gammon informing him that Mr. Snap would be obliged to return to town by the next day's coach. The reader will smile when I tell him, and if a lady, will frown when she hears, that Miss Quirk was to be of the party—a point which her anxious father had secured some time ago. Mrs. Alias had declared that she saw no objection, as Mr. Quirk would be constantly with his daughter, and Gammon had appeared most ready to bring about so desirable a result. He had also striven hard, unknown to his partners, to increase their numbers, by the Tag-rags, who might have gone down, all three of them, if they had chosen, by coach, and so have returned. Gammon conceived that this step might not have been unattended with advantage in several ways; and would, moreover, have secured him a considerable source of amusement. Titmouse, however, would not listen to the thing for one moment, and Gammon was forced to give up his little scheme. Two dashing young fellows, fashionable friends of Titmouse (who had picked them up Heaven only knows where, but they never deserted him), infinitely to Gammon's annoyance, were to be of the party. He had seen them but once, when he had accompanied Titmouse to the play, where they soon joined him. One was a truly disgusting-looking fellow—a Mr. Pimp Yahoo—a man about five-and-thirty years old, tall, with a profusion of black hair parted down the middle of his head, and falling down in long clustering curls from each temple upon his coat collar. His whiskers also were ample, and covered two-thirds of his face, and spread in disgusting amplitude round his throat. He had also a jet-black tuft—an imperial—depending from his under lip. He had an execrable eye—full of insolence and sensuality; in short, his whole countenance bespoke the thorough debauchee and ruffian. He had been, he said, in the army; and was nearly connected, according to his own account—as with fellows of this description is generally the case—with "some of the first families in the North." He was now a man of pleasure about town—which contained not a better billiard-player, as the admiring Titmouse had had several opportunities of judging. He was a great patron of the ring—knew all their secrets—all their haunts. He always had plenty of the money of other people, and drove about in a most elegant cab, in which Titmouse had often had a seat; and as soon as Mr. Yahoo had extracted from his communicative little companion all about himself, he made it his business to conciliate his good graces by all the arts of which he was master—and he succeeded. The other chosen companion of Titmouse was Mr. Algernon Fitz-Snooks, a complete fool. He was the sole child of a rich tradesman—who had christened him by the sounding name given above; and afterwards added the patrician prefix to the surname, which also you see above, in order to gratify his wife and son. The youth had never "taken to business"—but was allowed to saunter about, doing and knowing nothing, till about his twenty-second year, when his mother died, followed a year afterwards by his father, who bequeathed to his hopeful son some fifty thousand pounds—absolutely and uncontrolledly. He very judiciously thought that youth was the time to enjoy life; and before he had reached his thirtieth

year, he had got through all his fortune except about five or six thousand pounds—in return for which, he had certainly got *something*; viz., an impaired constitution and a little experience, which *might*, possibly, be useful. He had a very pretty face—regular features, and interesting eyes; his light hair curled beautifully; and he spoke in a sort of lisp and in a low tone—and, in point of dress, always turned out beautifully. He also had a cab, and was a great friend of Mr. Yahoo, who had introduced him into a great deal of high society, principally in St. James's Street, where both he and Mr. Yahoo had passed a great deal of their time, especially during the nights. There was no intentional mischief in poor Fitz-Snooks: nature had made him only a fool—his prudent parents had done the rest; and if he fell into vice, it was only because he couldn't help it.

Such were the chosen companions of Titmouse; the one a fool, and the other a rogue—and “he *must*,” he said, “have them down at the *jollifying* at Yatton.” A groom and a valet, both newly hired the day before, would complete the party of the morrow. Gammon assured Titmouse that he had taken all the pains in the world to get up a triumphant entry into Yatton; his agents at Grilston, Messrs. Bloodsuck and Son, attorneys—the Radical electioneering attorneys of the county—who were well versed in the matter of processions, bands, flags, etc., etc., etc., had by that time arranged everything, and they were to be met, when within a mile of Yatton, by a procession. The people at the Hall, also, were under orders from Mr. Gammon through Messrs. Bloodsuck and Son, to have all in readiness—and a banquet prepared for nearly a hundred persons—in fact, all comers were to be welcome. To all this Titmouse listened with eyes glistening, and ears tingling with rapture; but can any tongue describe his emotion, on being apprised that the sum of £2,500, in the banker's hands, was now at his disposal—that it would be doubled in a few weeks—and that a cheque for £500, drawn by Mr. Titmouse on the London agents of the Grilston bankers, had been honoured on the preceding afternoon? Titmouse's heart beat fast, and he felt as if he could have worshipped Gammon. As for the matter of carriages, Mr. Gammon said, that probably Mr. Titmouse would call that morning on Mr. Axle, in Long Acre, and select one to his mind—it must be one with two seats—and Mr. Gammon had pointed out several which were, he thought, eligible, and would be shown to Mr. Titmouse. That would be the carriage in which Mr. Titmouse himself would travel; the second, Mr. Gammon had taken the liberty of already selecting. With this Mr. Gammon (just as the new valet brought in no less than seven boxes of cigars ordered overnight by Titmouse) shook his hand and departed, saying that he should make his appearance at the Cabbage-stalk the next morning, precisely at eleven o'clock—about which time it was arranged they were all to start.

Titmouse hardly knew how to contain himself on being left alone. About an hour or two afterwards, Titmouse made his appearance at Mr. Axle's. He carried on two businesses, one public, *i.e.*, a coachbuilder—one private, *i.e.*, a money-lender. He was a rich man—a very obliging and “accommodating” person, by means of which he had amassed a fortune of, it was believed, a hundred thousand pounds. He never made a fuss about selling on credit, lending, taking back, exchanging, carriages of all descriptions; nor in discounting the bills of his customers to any amount. He was generally right in each case in the long run. He would supply his fashionable victim with as splendid a chariot, and funds to keep it some time going, as he or she could desire; well knowing that in due time, after they had taken a few turns in it about the parks, and a few streets and squares in the neighbourhood, it would quietly drive up to one or two huge dingy fabrics in a different part of the town, where it would deposit its burden, and then return to its maker little the worse for wear, who took it back at about a twentieth part of its cost,

and soon again disposed of it in a similar way. Mr. Axle showed Mr. Titmouse very obsequiously over his premises, pointing out (as soon as he knew who he was) the carriages which Mr. Gammon had the day before desired should be shown to him, and which Mr. Titmouse, with his glass stuck in his eye—where it was kept by the pure force of muscular contraction—examined with something like the air of a connoisseur—rapping with his agate-headed cane every now and then—now against his teeth, then against his legs. He did not seem perfectly satisfied with any of them; they looked “devilish plain and dull.”

“Hollo—Mr. Axletree, or whatever your name is—what have we here? ‘Pon my soul, the very thing!” he exclaimed, as his eye caught sight of a splendid object—the state-carriage of the ex-sheriff, with its gorgeously decorated panels: which, having been vamped up for some six or seven successive shrievalties—(on each occasion heralded to the public by laudatory paragraphs in the newspapers, as entirely new and signal instances of the taste and magnificence of the sheriff elect)—seemed now *perfunctus officio*. Mr. Axle was staggered for a moment, and scarce supposed Mr. Titmouse to be in earnest—Gammon having given him no inkling of the real character of Titmouse; but observing the earnest, steadfast gaze with which he regarded the glittering object, having succeeded in choking down a sudden fit of laughter, he commenced a most tempting eulogium upon the splendid structure—remarking on the singularity of the circumstance of its happening just at that exact moment to be placed at his disposal by its former owner—a gentleman of great distinction, who had no longer any occasion for it. Mr. Axle had had numerous applications for it already; on hearing which, Titmouse got excited. The door was opened—he got in; sat on each seat—“Don’t it hang beautifully?” inquired the confident proprietor, swaying about the head of the carriage as he spoke. “Let us see, who was it that was after it yesterday? Oh—I think it was Sir Fitzbiscuit Gander; but I’ve not closed with him.”

“What’s your price, Mr. Axletree?” inquired Titmouse rather heatedly, as he got out of the carriage. After some little higgly-haggle he bought it!!!—for there was nothing like closing at once when there was keen competition. Mr. Gammon could not have seen it when he was making his choice the day before! For the rest of the day he felt infinitely elated at his fortunate purchase, and excited his imagination by pictures of the astonishment and admiration which his equipage must call forth on the morrow. Punctual to his appointment, Mr. Gammon, a few moments before the clock struck eleven on the ensuing morning, drew up to the Cabbage-stalk, as near at least as he could get to it, in a hackney coach, with his portmanteau and carpet-bag. I say as near as he could; for round about the door stood a little crowd, gazing with a sort of awe on a magnificent vehicle standing there, with four horses harnessed to it. Gammon looked at his watch as he entered the hotel, and asked which of the sheriff’s carriages was standing at the door. The waiter to whom he spoke seemed nearly splitting with laughter, which almost disabled him from answering that it was Mr. Titmouse’s carriage, ready for setting off for Yorkshire. Mr. Gammon opened his eyes involuntarily, turned pale, and seemed nearly dropping an umbrella which was in his hand.

“Mr. Titmouse’s!” he echoed incredulously. “Yes sir—been here this hour at least packing; such a crowd all the while; everybody thinks it’s the sheriff, sir,” replied the waiter, scarce able to keep his countenance. Mr. Gammon rushed upstairs with greater impetuosity than he had perhaps ever been known to exhibit before, and burst into Mr. Titmouse’s room. There was that gentleman, with his hat on, his hands stuck into his coat pockets, a cigar in his mouth, and a tumbler of brandy and water before him. Mr. Yahoo, and Mr. Fitz-Snooks, and Mr. Snap were similarly occupied; and Mr. Quirk was sitting

down with his hands in his pockets, and a glass of negus before him, with anything but a joyful expression of countenance.

"Is it possible, Mr. Titmouse——" commenced Gammon, almost breathlessly. "Ah, how d'ye do, Gammon?—punctual!" interrupted Titmouse, extending his hand. "Forgive me—but can it be, that the monstrous thing now before the door, with a crowd grinning around it, is *your carriage*?" inquired Gammon, with dismay in his face. "I—rather—think—it *is*," replied Titmouse, slightly disconcerted, but striving to look self-possessed. "My *dear* sir," replied Gammon, in a kind of agony, "it is *impossible*? It never can be! Do you mean to say that you bought it at Mr. Axle's?" "I should rather think so," replied Titmouse with a piqued air. "He's been grossly imposing on you, sir!—Permit me to go at once and get you a proper vehicle." "'Pon my life, Mr. Gammon, I think that it's a monstrous nice thing—a great bargain—and I've bought it and paid for it, that's more." "Gentlemen, I appeal to *you*," confidently said Gammon, turning in an agony to Mr. Yahoo and Mr. Fitz-Snooks.

"As for *me*, sir," replied the former coolly, at the same time knocking off the ashes from his cigar;—"since you ask my opinion, I confess I rather like the idea—ha! ha! 'Twill produce a *sensation*; that's something in this dull life!—Eh, Snooks?"

"Ay—a—I confess I was a little shocked at first, but I think I'm getting over it now," lisped Mr. Fitz-Snooks, adjusting his shirt-collar, and then sipping a little of his brandy and water. "I look upon it, now, as an excellent joke;—egad, it beats Chitterfield hollow, though *he*, too, has done a trick or two lately."

"Did you purchase it as a joke, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired Gammon with forced calmness, ready to expire with vexation and anger. "Why—a—'pon my life—if you ask *me*—wonder you don't see it! Of course I did!—Those that don't like it may ride, you know, in the other." "We shall be hooted at, laughed at, wherever we go," said he vehemently. "Exactly—that's the *novelty* I like," said Mr. Yahoo, looking at Mr. Gammon with a smile of ineffable insolence.

Mr. Gammon made him no reply, but fixed an eye upon him, under which he became plainly uneasy. He felt outdone. Talk of *scorn*!—the eye of Gammon, settled at that instant upon Mr. Yahoo, was its complete and perfect representative; and from that moment he, Mr. Yahoo, felt something like *fear* of the eye of man, or of *submission* to it. When, moreover, he beheld the manner in which Titmouse obeyed Gammon's somewhat haughty summons out of the room, he resolved to make a friend of Gammon. Titmouse proved, however, inexorable for once; he had bought and paid for the carriage; it suited his taste—and where was the harm of gratifying it? Besides, it was already packed—all was prepared for starting. Gammon gave it up; and, swallowing down his rage as well and as quickly as he could, endeavoured to reconcile himself to this infernal and most unexpected predicament.

It seems that Miss Quirk, however really anxious to go down to Yatton—to do anything, in short, calculated to commit Mr. Titmouse to her—was quite staggered on discovering, and shocked at seeing, the kind of persons who were to be their travelling companions. As for Mr. Yahoo, she recoiled from him with horror as soon as she had seen him. What decent female, indeed, would not have done so? She had retired to a bed-chamber soon after entering the Cabbage-stalk, and, seeing her two unexpected fellow-travellers, presently sent a chambermaid to request Mr. Quirk to come to her.

He found her considerably agitated. She wished earnestly to return to Alibi House; and consented to proceed on her journey only on the express promise of Mr. Titmouse, that no one should be in the carriage in which she went

except Mr. Quirk and Mr. Gammon—unless, indeed, Mr. Titmouse thought proper to make the fourth.

Mr. Quirk, on this, sent for Mr. Gammon, who, with a somewhat bad grace (“Confound it!” thought he, “everything seems going wrong”), undertook to secure Mr. Titmouse’s consent to that arrangement.

While he was thus closeted for about five or ten minutes with Mr. Quirk, one of the waiters informed Mr. Titmouse that a lad had brought a parcel for him, which he, the aforesaid lad, was to deliver into the hands of Mr. Titmouse. Accordingly there was presently shown into the room a little lad, in tarnished livery, in whom Titmouse recollected the boy belonging to Mr. Tag-rag’s one-horse chaise, and who gave a small parcel into Mr. Titmouse’s hands, “with Mrs. and Miss Tag-rag’s respects.”

As soon as he had quitted the room, “By Jove! What have we here?” exclaimed Titmouse, just a *little* flustered as he cut open the string. Inside was another parcel, wrapped up in white paper, and tied in a pretty bow, with thin satin ribbon. This again, and another within it having been opened,—behold there were three nice cambric pocket-handkerchiefs, which, on being examined, proved to be each of them marked with the initials “T. T.” in *hair*; and Mr. Yahoo happening to unfold one of them, lo! in the centre was—also done in hair—the figure of a heart transfixed with an arrow!!! Mr. Yahoo roared, and Mr. Fitz-Snooks lisped, “Is she pretty, Tit? Where’s her nest? Any *old* birds?—eh?”

Titmouse coloured a little, then grinned, and put his finger to the side of his nose, and winked his eye, as if favouring the bright idea of Mr. Fitz-Snooks. On a sheet of gilt-edged paper, and sealed with a seal bearing the tender words, “*Forget me not,*” was written the following :

“SIR,—Trusting you will excuse the liberty, I send you three best cambric pocket-handkerchiefs, which my daughter have marked with her own hair, and I beg your acceptance thereof, hoping you may be resigned to all that may befall you, which is the prayer of, dear sir, yours respectfully,

“MARTHA TAG-RAG.

“P.S.—My daughter sends what you may please to wish and accept. Shall we have the great happiness to see you here again?

“*Satin Lodge, 18th May, 18—.*”

“Oh! the naughty old woman! Fie! Fie!” exclaimed Mr. Yahoo, with his intolerable smile. “’Pon my soul, there’s nothing in it,” said Titmouse, reddening. “Where’s *Satin Lodge*?” inquired Mr. Fitz-Snooks. “It is a country-house on the—the Richmond-road,” said Titmouse, with a little hesitation; and just then the return of Gammon, who had resumed his usual calmness of manner, relieved him from his embarrassment. Mr. Gammon succeeded in effecting the arrangement suggested by Mr. Quirk and his daughter; and within about a quarter of an hour afterwards, behold the ex-sheriff’s resplendent but cast-off carriage filled by Miss Quirk and Titmouse, and Mr. Quirk and Gammon—the groom and valet sitting on the coach-box; while in the other, a plain yellow carriage, covered with luggage, sat Mr. Yahoo, Mr. Fitz-Snooks, and Mr. Snap, all of them with lighted cigars—Snap never having been so happy as at that moment.

Mr. Titmouse had laid aside his cigar in compliment to Miss Quirk, who had a long black veil on, and an elegant light shawl, and looked uncommonly like a young bride setting off—oh, Heavens! that it *had* been so!—on her wedding excursion. Mr. Gammon slouched his hat over his eyes, and inclined his head

downwards, fit to expire with vexation and disgust, as he observed the grin and tittering of the crowd around; but Titmouse, who was most splendidly dressed, took off his hat on sitting down, and bowed several times to, as he supposed, the admiring crowd.

"Get on, boys!" growled Mr. Gammon; and away they went, exciting equal surprise and applause wherever they went. No one that met them but must have taken Titmouse and Miss Quirk for a newly-married couple—probably the son or daughter of one of the sheriffs, who had lent the state carriage to add *éclat* to the interesting occasion.

With the exception of the sensation produced at every place where they changed horses, the only incident worth noting that occurred during their journey, was at the third stage from London. As they came dashing up to the door of the inn, their advent setting all the bells of the establishment ringing, and waiters and ostlers scampering up to them like mad, they beheld a plain and laden dusty travelling-carriage, waiting for horses—and Gammon quickly perceived it to be the carriage of the unfortunate Aubreys! The travellers had alighted. The graceful figure of Miss Aubrey, her face pale, and wearing an expression of manifest anxiety and fatigue, was standing near the door, talking kindly to a beggar-woman, with a cluster of half-naked children around her; while little Aubrey was romping about with Miss Aubrey's beautiful little spaniel Cato; Agnes, looking on and laughing merrily, and trying to escape from the hand of her attendant. Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey were talking together, close beside the carriage-door. Gammon observed all this, and particularly that Mr. Aubrey was scrutinizing their appearance, with a sort of half-smile on his countenance, melancholy as it was.

"Horses on!" said Gammon, leaning back in the carriage.

"That's a monstrous fine woman standing at the inn door, Titmouse—eh?" exclaimed Mr. Yahoo, who had alighted for a moment, and stood beside the door of Titmouse's carriage, looking with his execrable eye towards Miss Aubrey. "I wonder who and what she is? By Jove, 'tis the face—the figure of an angel! egad, they're *somebody*; I'll look at their panels." "I know who it is," said Titmouse, rather faintly; "I'll tell you by-and-by." "Now, now! my dear fellow. Our divinity is vanishing," whispered Mr. Yahoo eagerly, as Miss Aubrey, having slipped something into the beggar's hand, stepped into the carriage. She was the last to get in; and as soon as the door was closed, they drove off.

"Who's that, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired Miss Quirk with a little eagerness, observing women are very quick in detecting such matters—that both Gammon and Titmouse looked rather embarrassed. "It's the—the Aubreys," replied Titmouse. "Eh! By Jove—is it?" quickly inquired old Quirk, putting his head out of the window; "how very odd, to meet the old birds? Egad! their nest must be yet warm—ha! ha!" "What! dear papa, are those the people you've turned out? Gracious! I thought I heard some one say that Miss Aubrey was pretty! La! I'm sure I thought—now what do *you* think, Mr. Titmouse?" she added, turning abruptly and looking keenly at him. "Oh! 'pon my life, I—I—see nothing at all in her—devilish plain, I should say—infernally pale, and all that!"

They were soon on their way again. Titmouse quickly recovered his equanimity, but Gammon continued silent and thoughtful for many—many miles; and the reader would not be surprised at it, if he knew as well as I do the thoughts which the unexpected sight of that travelling carriage of Mr. Aubrey had suggested to Mr. Gammon.

As they approached the scene of triumph and rejoicing, and ascertained that they were within about a mile of the peaceful little village of Yatton, the travellers began to look out for indications of the kind which Mr. Gammon

had mentioned to Titmouse, viz., a band and procession, and an attendant crowd. But however careful and extensive might have been the arrangements of those to whom that matter had been entrusted, they were likely to be sadly interfered with by a circumstance which, happening just then, might, to a weaker and more superstitious mind than that of Mr. Titmouse, have looked a little ominous—namely, a tremendous thunder-storm. It was then about five o'clock in the afternoon. The whole day had been overcast, and the sky threatening; and just as the two carriages came to that turning in the road which gave them the first glimpse of the Hall—only, however, the tops of the great chimneys, which were visible above the surrounding trees—a fearful, long-continued flash of lightning burst from the angry heavens, followed, after an interval of but a second or two, by a peal of thunder which sounded as if a park of artillery was being repeatedly discharged immediately overhead.

"Mind your horses' heads, boys," called out Mr. Gammon; "keep a tight rein."

Miss Quirk was dreadfully alarmed, and clung to her father; Titmouse also seemed disconcerted, and looked to Gammon, who was perfectly calm, though his face was not free from anxiety. The ghastly glare of the lightning was again around them—all involuntarily hid their faces in their hands—and again rattled the thunder in a peal that lasted more than half a minute, and seemed in frightful contiguity, as it were only a few yards above their heads. Down, then, came the long-suspended rain, pouring like a deluge, and so it continued, with frequent returns of the thunder and lightning, for nearly a quarter of an hour. The last turning brought them within sight of the village, and also of some fifty or sixty persons crowding under the hedges on each side—these were the procession; musicians, bannermen, footmen, horsemen, all dripping with wet, surely a piteous spectacle to behold. Out, however, they all turned, true to their orders, as soon as they saw the carriages, which immediately slackened their speed—the rain also somewhat abating. The flagmen tried desperately to unroll a wet banner, of considerable size, with the words "Welcome to Yatton!" in gilded letters; while the band (consisting of a man with a big drum, another with a serpent, a third with a trumpet, a fourth with a bassoon, two with clarionets, and a boy with a fife) struck up—"See the conquering hero comes!" They puffed and blew lustily; bang! bang! bang! went the drum; but the rain, the thunder, and the lightning woefully interfered with their harmony. 'Twould have made your heart ache to see the wet flag clinging obstinately to the pole, in spite of all the efforts of its burly bearer! First, on horseback, was Barnabas Bloodsuck (senior), Esq.; beside him rode his son, Barnabas Bloodsuck (junior), Esq.; then came the Reverend Gideon Fleshpot, solemn simpleton, the vicar of Grilston, the only Radical clergyman in that part of the country; beside him, the Reverend Smirk Mudflint, a flippant, bitter, little Unitarian parson, a great crony of Mr. Fleshpot, and his name singularly enough exactly designating the qualities of his brain and heart. Next to these, alone in his one-horse chaise (looking like a pill-box drawn by a leech), came the little fat Whig apothecary, Gargle Glister, Esq. Following him came Going Gone, Esq., the auctioneer—the main prop of the Liberal side, being a most eloquent speaker—and Mr. Hic Hæc Hoc, a learned schoolmaster, who taught the Latin grammar up as far as the irregular verbs. Then there were Mr. Centipede, the occasional editor, and Mr. Woodlouse, the publisher and proprietor of the "*Yorkshire Stingo*," for which, also, Mr. Mudflint wrote a great deal.

These, and about a dozen others, the flower of the "party" thereabouts, disdainful of the inclement weather, bent on displaying their attachment to the new Whig owner of Yatton, and solacing each his patient inner man with anticipation of the jolly cheer that awaited them at the Hall, formed the

principal part of the procession; the rest, consisting of rather a miscellaneous assortment of scot-and-lot and pot-walloper-looking people, all very wet and hungry, and ever and anon casting a look of devout expectation towards the Hall. Scarcely a villager of Yatton was to be seen stirring; nor did any of the tenants of the estate join in the procession; even had they not felt far otherwise disposed, they had luckily a complete excuse for their non-appearance in the deplorable state of the weather. Sometimes the band played; then a peal of thunder came; then a cry of "hurra! Titmouse for ever! hurra!" then the band, and then the thunder, and rain! rain! rain! Thus they got to the park gates, where they paused, shouting, "Titmouse for ever! hurra—a—a!" Mr. Titmouse bobbing about, now at one window, then at the other, with his hat off, in the most gracious manner. Really, it almost seemed as if the elements were conspiring to signalize, by their disfavour, Mr. Titmouse's assumption of Yatton; for just as he was passing under the old gateway, out flashed the lightning more vividly than it had yet appeared, and the thunder bellowed and reverberated among the woods as though it would never have ceased. The music and shouting ceased suddenly; carriages, horsemen, pedestrians quickened their pace in silence, as if anxious to get out of the storm; the horses now and then plunging and rearing violently. Titmouse was terribly frightened, in spite of his desperate efforts to appear unconcerned. He was as pale as death, and looked anxiously at Gammon, as if hoping to derive courage from the sight of his countenance. Miss Quirk trembled violently, and several times uttered a faint scream; but her father, old Mr. Quirk, did not seem to care a pinch of snuff about the whole matter: he rubbed his hands together cheerily, chuckled his daughter under the chin, rallied Titmouse, and nudged and jeered Gammon, who seemed disposed to be serious and silent. Having drawn up opposite the Hall door, it was opened by Mr. Griffiths, with rather a saddened, but a most respectful look and manner; and in the same way might be characterized some six or seven servants standing behind him, in readiness to receive the new comers. The half-drowned musicians tried to strike up "Rule Britannia," as the hero of the day, Mr. Titmouse, descended from his carriage, Mr. Griffiths holding an umbrella for him, and bounded out of the rain with a hop, step, and jump into the Hall, where the first words he was heard to utter, were—"What a devilish rum old place!"

"God bless you! God bless you! God bless you, Titmouse!" exclaimed old Mr. Quirk, grasping him by the hand as soon as he had entered. Titmouse shook hands with Miss Quirk, who immediately followed a female servant to an apartment, being exceedingly nervous and agitated. Gammon seemed a little out of spirits; and said simply, "You know, Titmouse, how fervently I congratulate you."

"Oh! my dear boy, Tit, do, for Heaven's sake, if you want the thunder and lightning to cease, order those wretched devils off—send them anywhere, but do stop their cursed noise, my dear boy!" exclaimed Mr. Yahoo, as soon as he had entered, putting his fingers to his ears.

"Mr. what's-your-name," said Titmouse, addressing Mr. Griffiths, "I'll trouble you to order off those fellows and their infernal noise. Demme! there's a precious row making up above, and surely *one at a time!*" "Ah, ha, capital joke, by Jove! capital!" said Mr. Fitz-Snooks. "A—Titmouse—by Jupiter!" said Mr. Yahoo, as, twirling his fingers about in his long black hair, of which he seemed very proud, he glanced about the Hall, "this a'n't so much amiss! Do you know, my dear boy, I rather like it; it's substantial, antique, and so forth."

"Who are those dem ugly old fellows up there?" presently exclaimed Titmouse, as, with his glass stuck into his right eye, and his hands into his coat pockets, he stood staring at the old-fashioned pictures standing round the Hall.

"Some of them are ancestors of the Dreddlingtons, others of the Aubrey families. They are very old, sir," continued Mr. Griffiths, "and are much admired, and Mr. Aubrey desired me to say, that if you should be disposed to part——"

"Oh, confound him, he may have 'em all, if that's what he wants: *I* shall soon send them packing off!" Mr. Griffiths bowed, and heaved a very deep sigh. By this time the Hall was crowded with the gentlemen who had formed part of the procession, and who came bowing and scraping to Titmouse, congratulating him, and wishing him health and happiness. As soon as he could disengage himself from their flattering but somewhat troublesome civilities, his valet came and whispered, "Will you dress, sir? All is ready," and Titmouse followed him to the dressing-room which had formerly been young Mrs. Aubrey's. 'Twas the first time that Titmouse had ever experienced the attentions of a valet, and he was quite nonplussed at the multitudinousness and elegance of the arrangements around him. Such quantities of clothes of all sorts—dressing-implements, combs, brushes, razors, a splendid dressing-case, scents in profusion, oils, bear's-grease, four or five different sorts of soaps, etc., etc.; all this gave Titmouse a far livelier idea of his altered circumstances, of his having really become a gentleman, than anything which he had up to that moment experienced. He thought his valet one of the cleverest and most obliging men in the world, only he oppressed him with his attentions, and at length Mr. Titmouse said he preferred, *this* time, dressing alone, and so dismissed his obsequious attendant. In about an hour's time, having been obliged to summon Tweedle to his assistance after all, he had completed his toilet, and was ushered into the drawing-room, which, as well as the dining-room, was ready prepared for the banquet, forty or fifty covers being laid in the two rooms, and good substantial fare for at least as many more in the servants' hall, where operations had already commenced.

On entering the drawing-room, his appearance seemed to produce a great sensation, and after a little pause, the only county gentleman who was present advanced and introduced himself, his wife, and daughter. This was Sir Harkaway Rotgut Wildfire, Baronet, a tall and somewhat corpulent man of about fifty, very choleric and overbearing, his countenance showing the hard life he had led, his nose being red, and his forehead and mouth beset with pimples. He had been a bitter political opponent of Mr. Aubrey, and had once been a member for the county, but had so crippled his resources by hunting and horse-racing, as to compel the sacrifice of their town amusements; viz., his seat in the House of Commons, and Lady Wildfire's box at the opera. This had soured both of them not a little, and they had sunk, as it were, out of the county circle, in which they had once been sufficiently conspicuous. Sir Harkaway had an eye to the borough of Yatton on the happening of the next election, as soon as he had obtained an inkling that the new proprietor of Yatton was a very weak young man; and hence his patronizing presence at Yatton, in consequence of the invitation respectfully conveyed to him in Mr. Titmouse's name, through Messrs. Bloodsuck and Son. Besides Lady Wildfire and her daughter, both of whom had inquired with a sort of haughty curiosity about the lady who had accompanied Mr. Titmouse from town—a point which had been at length cleared up to their satisfaction—there were about a dozen ladies, the wives of the gentlemen who had borne so distinguished a part in the triumphal procession. They looked rather a queer set, and none of them dared to speak either to Lady Wildfire or her daughter till spoken to by them. Never had old Yatton beheld within its walls so motley a group; and had the Aubreys continued there, hospitable as they were, accessible and charitable as they were, I leave the reader to guess whether such creatures ever *would* have found their way thither. By such guests, however, were the two principal

tables crowded on this joyous occasion, and about half-past six o'clock the feast commenced, and a feast it certainly was, nothing having been spared that money could procure. Mr. Aubrey had a fine cellar of wines at Yatton, which, owing to some strange misunderstanding, had been sold by private contract, not amongst his own friends in the neighbourhood, as Mr. Aubrey had intended, and imagined that he had directed, but to Mr. Titmouse. Choice, indeed, were these wines, and supplied on the present occasion in wanton profusion. Merriment echoed uproariously from all parts of the old Hall, and Mr. Titmouse was universally declared to be a very fine fellow, and likely to become by far the most popular man in the county. The Reverend Mr. Fleshpot said grace, and the Reverend Mr. Mudflint returned thanks; and shortly afterwards Sir Harkaway arose, and, his eye fixed firmly on the adjoining borough, and also on the jolly table which promised to be ever opened to him at Yatton, he proposed the health of the distinguished proprietor of Yatton, in certainly a somewhat fulsome strain. The toast was received with the utmost enthusiasm; the gentlemen shouted and jingled their glasses on the table, while the ladies waved their handkerchiefs; indeed the scene was one of such overpowering excitement, that Miss Quirk burst into tears, overcome by her emotions; her papa winking very hard to those about him, and using every exertion in his power to point the attention of those present to the probability that a very near and tender relationship was going to exist between that young lady and Mr. Titmouse. Mr. Gammon, who sat next to Titmouse, assured him that it was absolutely necessary for him to make a speech to the company in acknowledgment of the compliment which had just been paid him.

"I shall put my foot into it—by jingo I shall! You must help me!" he whispered to Mr. Gammon, in an agony of trepidation and a mist of confusion, as he rose from his chair, being welcomed in the most enthusiastic manner, by applause of every kind, lasting for several minutes. At length, when the noise had subsided into a fearful silence, he stammered out, prompted incessantly by Mr. Gammon, something exceedingly like the following, if, indeed, he did not use these very words.

"Mr.—I beg pardon—*Sir* Hark—away, and gentlemen—gentlemen and ladies, am most uncommon, monstrous—particular happy to—to—(eh? *what* d'y'e say, Mr. Gammon?) see you all here—at this place—here—at Yatton."—(*Applause.*) "Ladies and gentleman—I say—hem!—unaccustomed as—(*much applause*, during which Titmouse stooped and whispered to Gammon—"Curse me if I can catch a word you say!") "Happy and proud to see you all here—at Yatton—homes of my ancestry—known to you all—centuries. Enjoyed yourselves, I hope—(*great applause*)—and hope you'll often come and do the same—(*still greater applause*). Particularly glad to see the ladies—(*applause*)—often heard of the beauties of Yatton—never believed it—no—beg pardon, mean I now see them—(*applause*). Am fond of horses—(*applause*)—racing, hunting, and all that." (Here Sir Harkaway, extending his hand, publicly shook that of the eloquent speaker.) "Sorry to turn out the—the—old bird—but—nest not *his*—mine all the while—(*emotion*)—bear him no ill-will—(*applause*). Political principles—(*profound silence*) good old Whig principles—(*loud applause*)—rights of the people—religious liberty and all that—(*vociferous applause*)—found at my post in the hour of danger—enemy stole a march on me—(*great laughter and applause.*) Won't detain you—ladies and gentlemen—drink your good healths, and many happy returns of the day."

Down sat Mr. Titmouse, exhausted by his maiden speech; and quite overpowered, moreover, by the extraordinary applause with which he was greeted at its conclusion. In due course, many other toasts were drunk. "*Lady Wildfire and the married ladies.*" "*Miss Wildfire and the single ladies.*" "*Sir Harkaway Rotgut Wildfire.*" "*Religious Liberty*" (to which Mr. Mud-

flint responded in a very eloquent speech). "*The Liberty of the Press; Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, the enterprising, skilful, and learned professional advisers of Mr. Titmouse.*"

Dancing was now loudly called for; and the hall was speedily prepared for it. By this time, however, it was past eleven o'clock: the free potations of all the men, and indeed of more than one of the ladies, were beginning to tell, and the noise and confusion were very great. Fierce and confused sounds issued from the servants' hall, where it proved that a great fight was going on between Pumpkin the gardener, and a man who insisted on shouting "Titmouse for ever—down with the Tory Aubrey!" Pumpkin had much the best of it, and beat his opponent, after a severe encounter, into silence and submission. Then there were songs sung in all the rooms at once—speeches made, half-a-dozen at the same time; in short, never before had such scenes been witnessed, or such uproar heard, within the decorous, the dignified, and venerable precincts of Yatton. Scenes ensued which really baffle description. Mr. Titmouse, of course, drank a great quantity of wine, although Mr. Gammon never left his side, and checked him fifty times when he was about to fill his glass; the excitement produced by wine, will, I trust, in some measure, mitigate the reader's indignation at hearing of a little incident which occurred, in which Titmouse was concerned, and which, about half-past three or four o'clock in the morning, served to bring that brilliant entertainment to a somewhat abrupt and rather unpleasant termination. Scarcely knowing where he was, or what he was about, I am sorry to say, that while standing, as well as he could, beside Miss Wildfire, to dance for the fifth time with her—a plump, fair-faced, good-natured girl of about nineteen or twenty—he suddenly threw his arms round her, and imprinted half-a-dozen kisses on her forehead, lips, cheek, and neck, before she could recover from the confusion into which this extraordinary assault had thrown her. Her faint shriek reached her father's ears, while he was, in a distant part of the room, persecuting Miss Quirk with his drunken and profligate impertinences. Hastily approaching the quarter whence his daughter's voice had issued, he beheld her just extricated from the insolent embrace of the half-unconscious Titmouse, and greatly agitated. With flaming eye and outstretched arm, he approached his unfortunate little host, and seizing hold of his right ear, almost wrung it out of his head, Titmouse quite shrieking with the pain it occasioned. Still retaining his hold, uttering the while most fearful imprecations—he gave him three violent kicks upon the seat of honour, the last of which sent him spinning into the arms of old Mr. Quirk, who was hurrying up to his relief, and who fell flat on the floor with the violent concussion. Then Miss Quirk rushed forward and screamed; a scene of dreadful confusion ensued; and at length the infuriated and half-drunken baronet, forced away by his wife and his daughter, quitted the Hall, and got into his carriage, uttering fearful threats and curses all the way home; without once adverting to the circumstance, of which also Lady Wildfire and her daughter were not aware, that he had been himself engaged in perpetrating the very same kind of misconduct which he had so severely and justly punished in poor Titmouse. As for Mr. Yahoo and Mr. Fitz-Snooks, they had been in quest of the same species of amusement the whole night; and had each of them, in pursuing their adventures in the servants' hall, very narrowly escaped much more serious indignities and injuries than had fallen to the lot of the hospitable owner of the mansion.

About half-past four o'clock, the sun was shining in cloudless splendour, the air cleared, and all nature seemed freshened after the storm of the preceding day; but what a scene was presented at Yatton? Two or three persons, one with his hat off, asleep; another grasping a half-empty bottle; and a third in a state of desperate indisposition, were to be seen, at considerable distances

from each other, by the side of the carriage-road leading down to the park gates. Four or five horses, ready saddled and bridled, but neglected, and apparently forgotten by both servants and masters, were wandering about the fine green old court opposite the Hall door, eating the grass, and crushing with their hoofs the beautiful beds of flowers and shrubs which surrounded it. Mr. Glisters's gig had got its wheels entangled with the old sundial,—having been drawn thither by the horse, which had been put into it at least two hours before; opposite the Hall door stood the post-chaise which had brought Mr. and Mrs. Mudflint and their daughter. The latter two were sitting in it, one asleep—the other, Mrs. Mudflint, anxiously on the look-out for her husband, from time to time calling to him, but in vain; for, about half-an-hour before, he had quitted the room where he, Mr. Fleshpot, Mr. Going Gone, and Mr. Centipede had been playing a rubber at whist, till they almost all of them fell asleep with their cards in their hands, and made his way to the stables, where, not finding his chaise in the yard, or his horses in the stalls, he supposed his wife and daughter had gone home, whither he followed them by the footpath leading through the fields which stretched along the high road to Grilston; and along which said fields he was, at that moment, staggering, hiccuping, not clearly understanding where he was, nor where he had last seen his wife and daughter. Candles and lamps were still burning and glittering in some of the rooms; and in the servants' hall there were some dozen or so, who, having awoke from a deep sleep, were calling for more ale, or wine, or whatever else they could get. Some of the old family servants had fled hours ago, from scenes of such unwonted riot, to their bedrooms, and, having locked and barricaded the doors, gone to sleep. Mr. Griffiths sat in an old arm-chair in the library, the picture of misery; he had been repeatedly abused and insulted during the night, and had fled thither, unable to bear the sight of the disgusting revelry that was everywhere around going forward. In short, at every point that caught the eye, were visible the evidences of the villainous debauchery that had prevailed for the last seven hours; and which, under the Titmouse dynasty, was likely to prevail at all times thereafter.

As for Mr. Titmouse, half stunned with the treatment he had experienced at the hands of Sir Harkaway, he had been carried to bed—to the late bedroom of Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey—where, by his excessive, and miscellaneous, and long-continued potations, aiding the effect of the serious injuries which he had sustained, he lay sprawling on the bed, half undressed, in a truly deplorable condition. Mr. Glisters, who had been summoned to his bed-side upwards of an hour before, sat now nodding in his chair beside his patient; and pretty nearly in a state of similar exhaustion were his valet and the housekeeper, who had, from time to time, wiped her eyes and sobbed aloud when thinking of past times, and the grievous change that had come over old Yatton. Mr. Yahoo, Mr. Fitz-Snooks, Mr. Snap, Mr. Quirk, and Miss Quirk (the last having retired to her bedroom in alarm, at the time of Titmouse's mischance), were in their respective chambers, all of them probably asleep. Poor Hector, chained to his kennel, having barked himself hoarse for several hours, lay fast asleep, no one having attended to him, or given him anything to eat since Mr. Titmouse's arrival. Gammon had fled from the scene, in disgust and alarm, to his bedroom, some three hours before, but unable to sleep—not, however, with excess of wine, for he had drunk but a very few glasses—had arisen about four o'clock, and was at that moment wandering slowly, with folded arms and downcast countenance, up and down the fine avenue of elm-trees, where, it may be recollected, Mr. Aubrey had spent a portion of the last evening of his stay at Yatton.

Such is *my* account—and as fair an account as I know how to give of the

matter; but it is curious to observe how differently the same thing will strike different people. As soon as the grateful Mr. Centipede had recovered from the excitement occasioned by the part he had taken in the memorable festival above described, he set to work with the pen of a ready writer, and in the next number of the "*Yorkshire Stingo*" there appeared the following interesting account of the

"FESTIVITIES at YATTON HALL, on the occasion of POSSESSION being taken by TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE, ESQUIRE.

"Yesterday this interesting event came off with signal *éclat*. Notwithstanding the very unfavourable state of the weather, about five o'clock in the evening an imposing cavalcade, comprising many of the leading gentry and yeomanry of this part of the county, on foot and on horseback, preceded by an admirable band, and a large and splendid banner, bearing the inscription—'Welcome to Yatton,' went out to meet the above gentleman, whose cortège, in two carriages, made its appearance in the village about half-past five. The band immediately struck up 'See the Conquering Hero comes!' which, however, was nearly drowned in the shout which welcomed the new proprietor of the noble estate of Yatton. His carriage was of the most tasteful, splendid, and unique description, and attracted universal admiration. Mr. Titmouse repeatedly bowed through the carriage windows, in graceful acknowledgment of the cordial welcome and congratulations with which he was received. He was dressed in a light-blue surtout, with velvet collar, full black stock, and a rich velvet waistcoat of plaid pattern. His countenance is handsome and expressive, his eye penetrating, and his brow strongly indicative of thought. He appears to be little more than twenty-five years old; so that he has before him the prospect of a long and brilliant career of happiness and public usefulness. Tables were spread in all the chief apartments, groaning beneath the most costly viands. All the luxuries of the season were there; and the wines (which we believe were those of Mr. Aubrey) were of the first description. Grace was said by the exemplary vicar of Grilston, the Rev. Mr. Fleshpot; and the Rev. Mr. Mudflint returned thanks. Sir Harkaway Rotgut Wildfire (whose amiable lady and accomplished daughter were present) proposed the health of Mr. Titmouse in a brief, but manly and cordial address; and the manner in which Mr. Titmouse acknowledged the toast, which was drunk with the greatest possible enthusiasm—the simplicity, point, and fervour which characterized every word he uttered—were such as to excite lively emotion in all who heard it, and warrant the highest expectations of his success in parliament. Nothing could be more touching than his brief allusions to the sufferings and privations which he had undergone—nothing more delicate and forbearing than the feeling which pervaded his momentary allusion to the late occupant of Yatton. When, however, he distinctly avowed his political principles as those of a strong and decided Whig—as those of a dauntless champion of civil and religious liberty among all classes of his Majesty's subjects—the applause was long and enthusiastic. After dinner, the great hall was cleared for dancing, which was opened by Mr. Titmouse and Miss Wildfire; Lady Wildfire being led out by the Hon. Mr. Yahoo, an intimate friend of Mr. Titmouse. We should not omit to mention that Miss Quirk (the only daughter of Caleb Quirk, Esq., the head of the distinguished firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, of London, to whose untiring and most able exertions is owing the happy change which has taken place in the ownership of the Yatton property) accompanied her father, at the earnest request of Mr. Titmouse, who danced several sets with her. Sir Algernon Fitz-Snooks, a distinguished fashionable, also accompanied Mr. Titmouse, and entered with great spirit into all the gaieties of the evening. The 'light fantastic toe' was kept 'tripping' till a late, or rather a very early hour in the morning—when the old Hall was once more (for a time)

surrendered to the repose and solitude from which it has been so suddenly and joyously aroused." [In another part of the paper was contained an insulting paragraph, charging Mr. Aubrey with being a party to the "flagrant and iniquitous job," by which Sir Percival Pickering had been returned for the borough; and intimating pretty distinctly that Mr. Aubrey had not gone without "*a consideration*" for his share in the nefarious transaction.]

A somewhat different account of the affair appeared in the "*York True Blue*" of the same day. "We have received one or two accounts of the orgies of which Yatton Hall was yesterday the scene, on occasion of Mr. Titmouse taking possession. We shall not give publicity to the details which have been furnished us, hoping that the youth and inexperience of the new owner of Yatton (all allowance, also, being made for the very natural excitement of such an occasion) will be allowed in some measure to palliate the conduct then exhibited. One fact, however, we may mention, that a very serious *fracas* arose between Mr. Titmouse and a certain well-known sporting Baronet, which is expected to give employment to the gentlemen of the long robe. Nor can we resist adverting to a circumstance, which our readers will, we trust, credit, on being assured that we witnessed it with our own eyes, that Mr. Titmouse positively travelled in the cast-off state carriage of the Lord Mayor of London!!!! Nothing, by the way, could be more absurd and contemptible than the attempt at a 'Procession' which was got up, of which our accounts are ludicrous in the extreme. Will our readers believe it, that the chief personages figuring on the occasion, were the editor and publisher of a certain low Radical paper, which will no doubt, this day, favour its readers with a flaming description of this 'memorable affair.'"

Titmouse, assisted by his attentive valet, made a desperate attempt to get up, and present himself the next day at dinner. Aided by a glass of pretty strong brandy and water, he at length got through the fatiguing duties of the toilet, and entered the drawing-room, where his travelling companions were awaiting his arrival—dinner being momentarily expected to be announced. He was deadly pale; his knees trembled; his eyes could not bear the light; and everything seemed in undulating motion around him, as he sank in silent exhaustion on the sofa. After a few minutes' continuance, he was compelled to leave the room, leaning on Gammon's arm, who conducted him to his bedroom, and left him in charge of his valet, who got him again into bed, where he lay enduring much agony (Dr. Goddard being sent for), while his friends were enjoying themselves at dinner.

Snap had set off the ensuing day for town, by the first coach, pursuant to the arrangement already spoken of; but I think that old Mr. Quirk would have made up his mind to continue at Yatton until something definite had been done by Titmouse, in two matters which absorbed all the thoughts of the old gentleman—his daughter and the *Ten Thousand Pounds* bond. Miss Quirk, however, intense as was her anxiety to become the affianced bride of Titmouse, and as such the mistress of the delightful domain, where at present she dwelt only as a guest, and in a very embarrassing position, was not so blind to all perception of womanly delicacy as to prolong her stay at Yatton; and at length prevailed upon her father to take their departure on the day but one after that on which they had arrived. Mr. Quirk was perfectly wretched; he vehemently distrusted Titmouse, he feared and detested Gammon. As for the former gentleman, he had not made any definite advances whatever towards Miss Quirk. He had not afforded to any one the slightest evidence of a promise of marriage, either express or implied. He chattered to Miss Quirk an infinite deal of civil nonsense, but that was all, in spite of the innumerable opportunities afforded him by the lady. Was Titmouse acting under the secret

advice of that deceitful devil Gammon? thought Mr. Quirk, in an ecstasy of perplexity and apprehension. Then as to the other matter, but there Gammon had almost as deep a stake, in proportion, as Quirk himself. On the morning of his departure, he and Gammon had a very long interview, in which they several times came to high words; but in the end Gammon vanquished his opponent as usual; allayed all his apprehensions; accounted for Titmouse's conduct in the most natural way in the world—look at his position just now, the excitement, the novelty, the bewilderment, the indisposition he was experiencing; surely, surely *that* was not a moment to bring him to book! In short, Gammon at length brought Quirk, who had received the first intimation of the matter with a sudden *grunt* of surprise and anger, to acknowledge the propriety of Gammon's remaining behind to protect Titmouse from the designing Yahoo that had got hold of him; and solemnly pledged himself, as in the sight of Heaven, to use his utmost efforts to bring about, as speedily as possible, the two grand objects of Mr. Quirk's wishes. With this the old gentleman was fain to be satisfied; but entered the chaise which was to convey Miss Quirk and himself to Grilston, with as rueful a countenance as he had ever exhibited in his life. Mr. Titmouse was sufficiently recovered to be present at the departure of Miss Quirk, who regarded his interesting and languid looks with an eye of melting sympathy and affection. With half a smile and half a tear, she slipped into his hand, as he led her to the chaise, a little sprig of heart's ease, which he at once stuck into the button-hole of his coat.

"'Pon my soul, must you go? Devilish sorry you can't stay to have seen some fun! The old gent (meaning her father) don't quite seem to like it—he, he!" said he in a low tone: then he handed her into the chaise, she dropping her veil to conceal the starting tear of mingled disappointment, and desire, and disgust, and they drove off, Titmouse kissing his hand to her as he stood upon the steps; and, as soon as they were out of sight, he exchanged a very significant smile with Mr. Gammon.

The next day, Titmouse rose about ten o'clock, almost entirely recovered from his indisposition. Accompanied by Mr. Yahoo and Mr. Fitz-Snooks, with whom he was conversing as to the course he should take with reference to Sir Harkaway, whom, however, they advised him to treat with silent contempt, as he, Titmouse was clearly in the wrong—he took a stroll about noon, down the path leading to the park gates. They all three had cigars in their mouths, Titmouse walking between them, as odious-looking a little puppy, sure, as man ever saw, puffing out his smoke slowly, and with half-closed eye, his right hand stuck into his coat pocket, and resting on his hip. These three figures—Heaven save the mark!—were the new lord of Yatton and his select friends!

"By jingo, surely here comes a parson," quoth Titmouse; "what the d—! can he want with me?" 'Twas Dr. Tatham who slowly approached them, dressed in his Sunday suit, and leaning on his old-fashioned walking-stick, given him many, many years ago by the deceased Mrs. Aubrey.

"Let's have some sport," said Fitz-Snooks. "We must look devilish serious, no grinning till the proper time," said Yahoo. "Hallo, you, sir!" commenced Titmouse, "who are you?" Dr. Tatham took off his hat, bowed, and was passing on. "*Devilish* cool, upon my soul, sir!" said Titmouse, stopping, and staring impudently at the worthy little Doctor, who seemed taken quite by surprise.

"My worthy old gentleman," said Yahoo, with a mock respect, "are you aware who it was that asked you a question?" "I am not, sir," replied Dr. Tatham quietly, but resolutely. "My name is Tittlebat Titmouse, at your service—and you are now in my grounds," said Titmouse, approaching him with an impudent air. "*Have* I really the honour to address Mr. Titmouse?"

inquired Dr. Tatham, somewhat incredulously. "Why, 'pon my life I *think* so, unless I'm changed lately; and by Jove, sir—*now*, who are you?" "I am Dr. Tatham, sir, the vicar of Yatton: I *had* intended calling at the Hall to offer my compliments; but I fear I am intruding——"

"Devil a bit—no, 'pon honour, no! you're a very good old fellow, I don't doubt—is that little church outside yours?" "It is, sir," replied Dr. Tatham seriously and sternly; his manner completely abashing the presumptuous little coxcomb who addressed him. "Oh—well—I—I—'pon my soul, happy to see you, sir—you'll find something to eat in the Hall, I dare say——" "Do you preach in that same little church of yours next Sunday?" inquired Mr. Yahoo, whose gross countenance filled Dr. Tatham with unspeakable aversion. "I preach there *every* Sunday, sir, twice," he replied, gravely and distantly. "You see, sir," lisped Fitz-Snooks, "the prayers are so—so—*devilish* long and tiresome—if you could—eh?—shorten 'em a little?——"

Dr. Tatham slowly turned away from them, and, disregarding their calls to him, though their tone of voice was greatly altered, walked back again towards the gate, and quitted the park, for the first time in his life, with feelings of mortal repugnance. On reaching his little study, he sat down in his old arm-chair, and fell into a sad reverie that lasted more than an hour, and then he got up to go and see the old blind stag-hound fed—and he looked at it, licking his hands, with feelings of unusual tenderness; and the little Doctor shed a tear or two as he patted its smooth grey old head.

On Saturday morning, Mr. Titmouse, at Mr. Gammon's instance, had fixed to go over the estate, accompanied by that gentleman, and by Mr. Waters and Dickons, to give all the information required of them, and point out the position and extent of the property. To an eye capable of appreciating it, in what admirable order was everything! but Titmouse quickly tired of it, and when about a mile from the Hall, discovered that he had left his cigar-box behind him; at which he expressed infinite concern, and, greatly to the annoyance of Gammon, and the contempt of his two bailiffs, insisted on returning home; so they re-entered the park. How beautiful it was! Its gently undulating surface, smooth as if overspread with green velvet: trees, great and small, single and in clumps, standing in positions so picturesque and commanding; the broad, babbling, clear trout-stream winding through every part of the park, with here and there a mimic fall, seen faintly flashing and glistening in the distance; herds of deer suddenly startled amid their green pastures and silent shades, and moving off with graceful ease and rapidity; here and there a rustic bridge over the stream: here an old stone bench placed on an elevation commanding an extensive prospect; there a kind of grotto, or an ivy-covered summer-house; then the dense, extensive, and gloomy woods, forming a semicircular sweep round the back of the Hall; all around, nearly as far as the eye could reach, land of every kind in the highest state of cultivation, plentifully stocked with fine cattle, and interspersed with snug and substantial farms.

All this, thought Titmouse, might do very well for those who fancied that sort of thing; but as for *him*, how the devil could he have thought of leaving his cigars behind him! Where, he wondered, were Yahoo and Fitz-Snooks? and quickened his pace homeward.

On Gammon the scene they had been witnessing had made a profound impression; and as his attention was now and then called off from contemplating it by some ignorant and puerile remark of the proprietor of the fine domain, he felt a momentary exasperation at himself for the part he had taken in the expulsion of the Aubreys, and the introduction of such a creature as Titmouse. That revived certain other thoughts, which led him into speculations of a description which would have afforded uneasiness even to the little idiot

beside him, could he have been made aware of them. But the cloud that had darkened his brow was dispelled by a word or two of Titmouse. "Mr. Gammon, 'pon my soul you're devilish dull to-day," said he. Gammon started; and with his winning smile and cheerful voice, instantly replied, "Oh, Mr. Titmouse, I was only thinking how happy you are; and that you deserve it!"

"Yes; 'pon my soul it ought all to have been mine at birth! Don't it tire you, Mr. Gammon, to walk in this up-and-down, zig-zag, here-and-there sort of way. It does *me*, 'pon my life! What would I give for a cigar at this moment!"

The next day was the Sabbath, tranquil and beautiful; and just as the little tinkling bell of Yatton church had ceased, Dr. Tatham rose, in his reading-desk, and commenced the prayers. The church was quite full, for every one was naturally anxious to catch a glimpse of the new tenants of the Squire's pew. It was empty, however, till about five minutes after the service had commenced, when a gentleman walked slowly up to the church-door; and having whispered an inquiry of the old pew-opener which was the Squire's pew, she led him into it—all eyes settled upon him, and all were struck with his appearance, his calm, keen features, and gentlemanly figure. 'Twas, of course, Gammon; who, with the utmost decorum and solemnity, having stood for near a minute with his hat covering his face, during which time he reflected that Miss Aubrey had sat in that pew on the last occasion of his attendance at the church, turned round, and behaved with the greatest seriousness and reverence throughout the service, paying marked attention to the sermon. Gammon was an unbeliever, but he thought Dr. Tatham an amiable and learned enthusiast, but who was most probably in earnest; and he felt disposed to admit, as his eye glanced round the attentive and decent congregation, that the sort of thing was not without its advantages. Almost all present took him for Titmouse, and watched every turn of his countenance with intense interest; and, in their simplicity, they rejoiced that Mr. Aubrey's successor was, at all events, so grave and respectable-looking a man; and they fancied that he had frequently thought with kindness and regret of those whose seat he was occupying. About the middle of the service, the doors of the church being wide open, the congregation beheld three gentlemen smoking cigars, and laughing and talking together, approaching the porch. They were dressed very finely indeed; and were supposed to be some of the great friends of the new Squire. They stopped when within a few yards of the church; and after whispering together for a moment, one of them, having expelled a mouthful of smoke, stepped forward to the door, holding his cigar in one hand, and with the other taking off his hat. There was a faint smirk on his face (for he did not catch the stern countenance of Gammon anxiously directed towards him), till he beheld Dr. Tatham's solemn eye fixed upon him, while he made a momentary pause. Titmouse blushed scarlet; made a hesitating but most respectful bow; and, stepping back a few paces, replaced his hat on his head, and lit his cigar from that of Mr. Fitz-Snooks, within view, perhaps unconsciously, of more than half the congregation. Then the three gentlemen, after Mr. Titmouse had spoken a word or two to them, burst out into a laugh, and quitted the churchyard

CHAPTER XX.

AUBREY'S sudden plunge into the cold and deep stream of trouble, had—the first shock over—served, as it were, to brace his nerves. 'Tis at such a time, and on such an occasion, that the temper and quality of the soul are tried; whether it be weak in seeming strength, or strong in seeming weakness. How many are there, walking with smiling, complacent confidence along the flowery bank, who, if suddenly bidden to strip and enter, would turn pale and tremble as they reluctantly prepared to obey the stern mandate; and, after a convulsive shudder, a faint shriek, a brief struggle, disappear from the surface paralysed, never to be seen again! In such a point of view, let me hope that the situation of Aubrey—one of deepening difficulty and danger, the issue of which, hid in the darkness of the future, no earthly intelligence could predict—will excite in the thoughtful reader an anxiety not unmingled with confidence.

The enervating effects of *inactivity* upon the physical structure and energies of mankind few can have failed to observe. Rust is more fatal to metal than wear. A thorough-bred racer, if confined in stable or paddock, or a boxer born of the finest muscular make, if prematurely incarcerated in a gaol, will, after a few years, become quite unable to compete with those vastly their inferiors in natural endowments and capabilities; however, they may, with careful training, be restored to the full enjoyment and exercise of their powers. Thus is it with the temper and intellect of man, which, secluded from the scenes of *appropriate* stimulus and exercise, become relaxed and weakened. What would have become of the glorious spirit and powers of Achilles, if his days had all melted away in the emasculating inactivity and indulgence of the court of Lycomedes? The language of the ancient orator concerning his art may be applied to *life*, that not only its greatness, but its enjoyment, consists in action—*ACTION*. The feelings, for instance, may become so morbidly sensitive, as to give an appearance of weakness to the whole character; and this is likely to be specially the case of one born with those of superior liveliness and delicacy, if he be destined to move only in the regions of silent and profound abstraction and contemplation—in those refined regions which may be termed a sort of paradise, where every conceivable source of enjoyment is cultivated for the fortunate and fastidious occupants, to the very uttermost, and all those innumerable things which fret, worry, and harass the temper, the head, and the heart of the dwellers in the rude regions of ordinary life—most anxiously weeded out; instead of entering into the throng of life, and taking part in its constant cares and conflicts—scenes which require all his energies always in exercise, to keep his place and escape being trodden under foot. Rely upon it, that the man who feels a tendency to shrink from collision with his fellows, to run away with distaste or apprehension from the great practical business of life, does not enjoy moral or intellectual health; will quickly contract a silly conceit and fastidiousness, or sink into imbecility and misanthropy; and should devoutly thank Providence for the occasion, however momentarily startling and irritating, which stirs him out of his lethargy, his *cowardly* lethargy, and sends him among his fellows—put him, in a manner, upon a course of training; upon an experience of comparative suffering, it may be of sorrow, requiring the exercise of powers of which he had before scarcely been conscious, and giving him presently the exhilarating consciousness that he is exhibiting himself—a *man*.

I have endeavoured, in previous portions of this history, to delineate faithfully the character of Mr. Aubrey—one (how idle and childish would have been the attempt!) by no means *perfect*, yet with very high qualities; a noble

simplicity; a man, generous, confiding, sincere, affectionate: possessing a profound sense of religion, *really influencing his conduct in life*; an intellect of a superior order, of a practical turn, of a masculine strength—as had been evidenced by his successful academical career, his thorough mastery of some of the most important and difficult branches of human knowledge, and by his superior aptitude for public business. He was at the same time possessed of a sensibility that was certainly excessive. He had a morbid tendency to pensiveness, if not melancholy, which, with a feeble *physical* constitution, was partly derived from his mother, and partly accounted for by the species of life which he had led. From his early youth he had been addicted to close and severe study, which had given permanence and strength to his naturally contemplative turn. He had not, moreover, with too many possessed of his means and station, entered, just at the dawn and bloom of manhood, upon that course of dissipation which is a sure and speedy means of destroying “the freshness of thought and of feeling,” and inducing a *lowered tone* of feeling, and a callousness which some seem to consider necessary to enable them to pass through life easily and agreeably. He, on the contrary, had stepped out of the gloom and solitude of the cloister into the pure and peaceful region of domestic life, with all its hallowed tenderness, where the affections grew luxuriantly; in the constant society of such women as his mother, his sister, his wife, and latterly his lovely children. Then he was possessed, all this while, of a fine fortune—one which placed him far beyond the necessity for anxiety or exertion. With such tastes as these, such a temperament as his, and leading such a life as his, is it surprising that the tone of his feelings should have become somewhat relaxed? The three or four years which he had spent in Parliament, when he plunged into its fierce and absorbing excitement with characteristic ardour and determination, though calculated to sharpen the faculties, and draw forth the resources of his intellect, subjected him to those alternations of excitement and depression, those extremes of action and reaction, which were not calculated to *correct* his morbid tendencies.

Therefore came there up to him a messenger from Heaven, with trouble and affliction in his countenance, telling him to descend from the happy solitude of his high mountain, into the dismal hubbub and conflict in the plain beneath. He came down with humility and awe, and with reverent resignation; and was—instantly surrounded!—

A weak man would have been confused and stunned, and so sunk helpless into the leaden arms of despair. But it was not so with Aubrey. There was that dormant energy within, which, when appealed to, quickly shook off the weakness contracted by inaction, and told him to *be up and doing*; and that not with the fitful energy of mere impulse, but the constant strength of a well regulated mind, conscious of its critical position; and also of a calm inflexible determination to vanquish difficulty, and if possible escape the imminent danger, however long and doubtful might prove the conflict. Above all, he was consoled and blessed by the conviction, that nothing could befall him that was not the ordination of Providence,

—“supremely wise,
Alike in what it gives and what denies;”

that His was the ordering of the sunshine and the gloom, the tempest and the calm of life.

The last time that we caught a glimpse of the ruined family, they had arrived nearly at the end of their long and melancholy journey from Yatton to the metropolis. When before had such been the character of their journey

to town? Had they not even looked forward with pleasure towards the brilliant gaieties of the season; their re-entrance into an extensive and splendid circle of friends—and he into the delightful excitement of political life—the opening of the parliamentary campaign? Alas, how changed now all this! how gloomy and threatening the aspect of the metropolis, whose dusky outskirts they were entering! With what feelings of oppression—of vague indefinite apprehension—did they now approach it: their spirits heavy, their hearts bleeding with their recent severance from Yatton! Now, distress, desertion, dismay, seemed associated with the formidable name of “London.” They had now no place of their own awaiting, thoroughly prepared for them, their welcome arrival—but must drive to some quiet and inexpensive family hotel for temporary shelter. As their eyes caught familiar point after point in their route through the suburbs—now passed at a moderate pace, with a modest pair of horses; formerly dashed past by them in their carriage and four—there were very few words spoken by those within the carriage. Both the children were fast asleep. Poor Kate, as they entered Piccadilly, burst into tears: her pent-up feelings suddenly gave way, and she cried heartily; Mrs. Aubrey also shedding tears. Mr. Aubrey was calm, but evidently oppressed with profound anxiety. Still he affectionately grasped their hands, and, in something designed for a cheerful tone and manner, besought them to restrain their feelings, and thank Heaven that so far they had got on safely.

“I shall be better presently, Charles,” said Miss Aubrey passionately, burying her face in her handkerchief, “but I feel quite *afraid* of London!”

Over the pavement they rattled, meeting carriages rolling in all directions—for it was about the dinner hour, and in the height of the season; and it was the casual but vivid evidence thus afforded of their desolate position, this sudden glimpse of old familiar scenes, which had momentarily overcome the fortitude of Miss Aubrey. They drove to a quiet family hotel in a retired street running parallel with Piccadilly; they were all wearied, both in mind and body, and after a very slight repast, and much anxious and desponding conversation, they bade each other affectionate adieus, and retired to rest. They rose in the morning refreshed with repose, and in a much more tranquil mood of mind than could have been expected.

“Now we enter,” said Aubrey, with a cheerful smile, “upon the real business of life; so we must discard sentiment—we must not think of the past, but the future.”

At their request, they, shortly after breakfast, accompanied him to the house agent, who had been commissioned by Mr. Runnington to look out two or three residences such as, on their arrival in town, they might easily select from. One was particularly recommended to them; and, after due inquiry, within three days after their arrival in town, they engaged it. 'Twas a small, but convenient, airy, and comfortable house, within five minutes' walk of Hyde Park, and situated in Vivian Street—a recent street—and as quiet and retired as they could have wished. The rent, too, was moderate—fifty pounds a-year. Though none of the houses in the street were large, they were all strictly private residences, and had an air of thorough respectability. Mr. Aubrey's house had but one window to the dining-room, and two to the drawing-room. The passage and staircase were sufficiently commodious, as were the rooms. At the back of the house was a small garden, about twenty yards in length, and about ten yards in width, with several lilacs, laburnums, and shrubs; and a considerable portion of the wall was covered with ivy. Was not this a delightful place for the children to play about in? The back parlour, a somewhat small room certainly, looked into this garden; and that room was at once appropriated to a study for Mr. Aubrey. Within a week's time all their luggage, furniture, etc., had arrived in town from Yatton; and they had

quite sufficient to furnish their little residence out of the wreck of the furniture and equipments of the old Hall—adapted, as it was, under the tasteful superintendence of Mrs. and Miss Aubrey, with equal regard to elegance, simplicity, and economy. How busy were they all for a fortnight! Many and many an irrepressible sigh, and rebellious tear, would the sight of these old familiar objects, in their new situation, occasion there! Some half-dozen family pictures hung upon the wall. Over the mantelpiece was suspended a piece of beautiful embroidery—by poor old Mrs. Aubrey, many years before—of the arms of the family. In the dining-room was the old high-backed chair in which she had sat for twenty years and more. In the drawing-room was Miss Aubrey's favourite cabinet, and Mrs. Aubrey's piano; and in both the rooms were to be seen everywhere the delicate traces of dear, dear, graceful, and elegant woman—touching nothing that she adorns not! What with the silk curtains, and a carpet of simple but tasteful pattern, and the various articles of furniture and ornament, all possessing a kind of *old family air*—all from Yatton, I declare there was a kind of richness about the general aspect of the room; and when Mrs. Aubrey and Miss Aubrey came to fetch Mr. Aubrey out of his study to witness the completion of their labours, he gazed round him, looked at each object, and then at the two dear fond beings standing beside him, awaiting his opinion with womanly eagerness; but he could not express his feelings. He kissed each of them very tenderly, and in silence, and then they were a little overcome. His study, also, though *very small*, was as snug and comfortable as a book-worm could desire. All the sides were covered with books, and in the middle were the library-table and arm-chair which he had used in Grosvenor Street, and which were certainly on too large a scale for the little room to which they had been removed. That they were not incessantly and very painfully reminded of the contrast afforded by their present to their former circumstances, I do not pretend to assert; but it very, very seldom formed a topic of *conversation* between any of them. When, however, the little bustle and occupation of arranging their house was over, and Mrs. Aubrey and Kate were left a good deal to themselves—Mr. Aubrey being either absent from home, or in his study, engaged in matters of the last importance to them all—then they would talk together with increasing eagerness and excitement about past times and their recent troubles and bereavements; not displaying then—sweet souls!—*quite* that degree of resignation and fortitude which they strove to exhibit in the presence of Mr. Aubrey. Now and then they could scarcely refrain from a melancholy smile, when they remarked upon their shrunken personal importance. “Really, Agnes,” said one day Miss Aubrey, “I feel just as one can fancy a few poor newly-shorn sheep must feel! So light and cold! So much *less* than they were half an hour before! Surely they must hardly know what to make of themselves!”

“Then I suppose, mamma,” said Charles, who was sitting on a stool beside them—making believe to write on a small slate—“I am a *little* sheep?” They both looked at the child with silent tenderness, and presently thought of Him who “*tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.*”

Their proximity to the parks was delightful, and many a pleasant hour did they pass there with the children; and then returning home, would occupy themselves with writing letters—and long ones they usually were—to early and loved friends, especially to Dr. Tatham, with whom Miss Aubrey kept up a constant correspondence. I ought to have mentioned before that Mr. Aubrey, in bringing his favourite valet up to town with him, had no other design than, with that kind thoughtfulness for which he was remarkable, to have an opportunity of securing for him a good situation; and that he succeeded in doing, after about a fortnight's interval; but the poor fellow was

quite confounded when he first heard that he was to quit the service of Mr. Aubrey, and, almost falling on his knees, begged to be permitted to continue and receive no wages, and he should be a happy man. Mr. Aubrey was, however, firm; and on parting with him, which he did with no little emotion, put two guineas into his hand as a present, and wished him health and happiness. The poor fellow's deep distress at parting with the family sensibly affected them all, and reminded them vividly of one of the latest and bitterest scenes at Yatton. On his departure, their little establishment consisted but of three female servants, a cook, a housemaid, and a nurserymaid. It took them some little time to familiarize themselves with the attendance of a female servant at dinner! That was one little matter—and another was Charles now and then complaining of being tired, and inquiring why his mamma did not drive in the carriage as she used to do, and how he liked to go with her! which brought home to them, in a lively manner, their altered circumstances—their fallen fortunes. Many, many were the anxious calculations they made together, of the probable amount of their annual expenditure—which at length, inexperienced as they were, they fixed at from £300 to £500, including everything; Mrs. Aubrey and Miss Aubrey eagerly assuring Mr. Aubrey, and each other, that as for clothes—their wardrobe would, with care, last them for three or four years to come—so that *that* was an item which might be almost altogether excluded from the account; except, by the way, the children—yes, *they* should be always well-dressed; that all agreed upon. Then there was their education—oh, Kate would see to that! Could they, in this manner, with rigid, systematic economy, hold on their way for a year or two? was a question they often asked one another, with beating hearts. If they could, then, they said, they should be happy; for they had *health*—they had peace of mind; their consciences were not oppressed by a sense of misconduct—and they were able to put their trust in Providence.

Mr. Aubrey resolved to live in strict privacy; and they communicated their residence to but one or two of their numerous friends, and to them only in confidence. To have acted otherwise, would have seriously interfered with the arrangements which, long ago contemplated, he had now fixed upon; it would be perpetually calling their attention to the contrast between former days and scenes, and the present: it would disturb their feelings, and might, moreover, subject them to kind and generous importunities and offers, which, however delicate, would be exquisitely painful and trying to an honourable pride.

From the moment when Aubrey received the first intimation of the desperate assault about to be made upon his fortunes, he felt a conviction, whether arising from weakness, or superstition, or any other cause, it concerns me not here to say—that the issue would be a disastrous one for him; and, the first alarm and confusion over, with serious calmness, with deep anxiety, addressed himself to the determination of his future course of life. A man of his refined taste and feeling would inevitably appreciate exquisitely—with a most agonizing intensity—the loss of all those superior enjoyments—the *delicæ* of life—to which he had been from his birth accustomed. I speak not here of the mere exterior “appliances and means” of wealth and station, but of the fastidious and sensitive condition of *feeling* and temper, which such a state of things is calculated to engender in a person of his description. He could part with the one; but how could he divest himself of the other? Even had he been alone in the world, and not surrounded with objects of the tenderest regard, whose safety or ruin was involved in his own, one of the results of his opponent's success—namely, his claim to the *mesne* profits—was calculated to fetter all his movements, to hang like a millstone round his neck; and that effect, indeed, it had. Still he played the man—resolved to act promptly, and

with the best consideration he could give his critical position. He had not yet reached the prime of life; had a fair share of health; had been blessed with the inestimable advantages of a thorough—a first-rate education—and, above all, had followed out his early advantages by laborious and systematic study; and had not only made accurate, extensive, and valuable acquisitions, but learned how to use them—to turn them to practical account. What would, he thought, have become of him, had he—or those before him—neglected his education? Then he had acquired a considerable familiarity with business-habits, in the House of Commons; and had friends and connections who might be of essential service to him, if he could but first succeed in acquiring a position that would enable him to avail himself of them. Surely all *these* were cheering considerations; subject, however, always to the dreadful drawback to which I have alluded. Had he not even advantages superior to those possessed by many in entering upon some one of the scenes of honourable struggle for a livelihood, and for even distinction? He surveyed them all with much deliberation. The army and navy were of course out of the question. There was the *Church*: but no—his soul recoiled from the degradation and guilt of entering that holy calling from mercenary motives, merely as a means of acquiring a livelihood; and he would rather have perished, than prefer the prayer of one whose lamentable case is left on record—who *came and crouched for a piece of silver, and a morsel of bread, saying, put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread.* A personage of very high distinction in the Church—of eminent piety and learning—who was aware of the misfortunes of Aubrey, and well acquainted with his pure and exemplary character—his learning and acquirements—his fitness for the ministerial office—wrote to him, offering him every facility for taking orders, and assuring him that he need not wait long before very suitable provision would be made for him. Though he assured Mr. Aubrey that he believed himself consulting the best interests, both of Mr. Aubrey and of the Church—the scruples of Mr. Aubrey were not to be overcome; and he wrote to the kind and venerable prelate, a letter declining his offers, and assigning reasons which filled him with profound respect for Mr. Aubrey. Then literature, for which—for real substantial literature—he possessed superior qualifications, was proverbially precarious. As for *teaching*—he felt quite unfit for it; he had not the least inclination for it; 'twas a cheerless scene of exertion; in which, as it were, he felt his energies *perishing in the using*. The Bar was the profession to which his tastes and inclinations, and, he hoped, his qualifications, pointed him. One of the first things he did, on reaching London, was to apply for information to one consummately qualified to guide him in the matter. He wrote to the Attorney-General, soliciting an interview at his chambers upon the subject of entering the profession; and received an immediate answer, appointing ten o'clock on Saturday, on which day the Attorney-General expected to be free from public engagements. Precisely at that hour, Mr. Aubrey entered the chambers of that distinguished person, whose arrival he anticipated. Poor Aubrey felt a little nervous and depressed as the fussy clerk showed him into the room—as *he fancied*, and only fancied—with an air of patronizing civility, as if aware of his diminished personal consequence. He stood for a minute or two very close to Mr. Aubrey, with a sort of confidence in his manner, as he rubbed his hands, and observed on the innumerable engagements of the Attorney-General, which slightly—*very slightly*—displeased Mr. Aubrey, suggesting the idea of undue familiarity. He answered the voluble clerk therefore courteously, but with an evident disinclination to prolong the conversation, and was quickly left alone. Poor Aubrey's pride had taken the alarm. Was it possible that the man had been presuming to give him a hint not to occupy much of the Attorney-General's time? Was it even possible that

it had been done in consequence of an intimation of the Attorney-General himself? Oh, no—his own good sense came presently to his assistance, and banished so absurd a notion. There were three tables in the room, and each was laden with briefs, some of them of prodigious bulk. Seven or eight very recent ones were placed on the table opposite to which his vacant chair was standing; the very sight of all this oppressed Aubrey: how could one man's head manage so much? He was ruminating on such matters—and especially upon the powerful, versatile, and practised intellect which was requisite to get through so much, especially amidst all the harassing responsibilities and occupations of political office, when the Attorney-General entered. He was a tall and handsome man, about forty-five, with an extremely graceful and gentleman-like carriage—a slight dash of negligence in it; his manner fraught with cheerful composure. He looked quite a man of the world; you would have thought that he could have nothing to do but lounge at his club, ride round the Park, and saunter into the House of Lords for an hour or two. There was not a trace of anxiety or exhaustion about him; yet he had been engaged during the whole of the preceding day conducting a great political cause, and not concluding his reply till nine o'clock at night? There was a playful smile about his mouth; his ample forehead seemed unfurrowed by a wrinkle; and his bright penetrating hazel eyes seemed never the worse for wear with all the tens of thousands of brief sheets on which they had travelled for the last twenty years.

"Ha—Aubrey—I'm a few minutes behind time, I'm afraid;—How are you?" said he, with a cheerful air, grasping his saddened visitor by the hand.

"Good morning, Mr. Attorney—*Cum tot sustineas, et tanta negotia, solus*"—commented Aubrey, pointing to the piles of briefs.

"Pho, my dear Aubrey; nonsense! They've enough of my time, surely, without grudging me half an hour's conversation with a friend—ah, ha!" They were both quickly seated—and within a minute or two's time the Attorney-General had *got to business*—the business of the visit. Aubrey perceived the rapidity of the movement; but nothing could be *kinder* than the manner of his companion, however distinct and decisive his intimation that time was very precious. He approved entirely of Mr. Aubrey's coming to the bar, and strongly recommended him not to lose one day in entering upon the serious practical study of it; informing him that, as an university man, within three years' time he would be eligible to be called to the bar. "I'll call you myself, Aubrey, if you will allow me," said he; but before that period had arrived, he had taken his seat upon the Woolsack, as Lord High Chancellor of England.

"Undoubtedly," said he, amongst other things, when pressed by Aubrey about the difficulties he should have to encounter, "the acquisition of the *technical* knowledge will be for some little time rather troublesome; but a twelve-month's steady study by a man who is in earnest and accustomed to work, will make a vast inroad on it. Everything you master, you see, helps to master so much more. Three years' serious application to the law by a man like you, will place you far ahead of the bulk of men at the bar. Besides, 'tis not the study but the *practice* of the law that teaches law most effectually.—Always have an eye to *principle*, and resolve thoroughly to understand the smallest details; and it will be a wonderful assistance in fixing them for practical use in your mind, to learn as much as you can of the reasons and policy in which they originated. You'll find Reeve's "*History of the English Law*" of infinite service to you; I should read it in the evenings; 'tis full of interest in every point of view. I read every word of it, very carefully, soon after I left college; and, by the way, I'll tell you another book, by which I did the same—the "*State Trials*"—ay, by Jove, Aubrey, I read every word of

them—speeches, examinations, cross-examination of witnesses, reply, and summing up. That's where I first learned how to examine and cross-examine a witness. Consider, the counsel employed were, you know, generally first-rate men, and exerted themselves, on such occasions, to the utmost. And there you also learn a great deal of *constitutional* law.—You ask how I get through so much? To be sure, one has enough to do, and I'm afraid I neglect a good deal; but the great secret is—*attention*, and to *one thing* at a time. The sun's rays scattered are comparatively powerless; condense them, they are irresistible: but all this you know as well as I do.—Certainly, law is difficult: but its difficulty is often greatly overrated, especially by imperfectly educated and ill-disciplined, *quick, sharp* men. You will find it a very different matter. What is wanted is a clear head, a good memory, strong common sense, an aptitude for analysis and arrangement; before these combined, the difficulties of law fly like the morning mist before the sun.—*Tact* with the court and jury is acquired by practice, to a considerable extent, in the absence even of natural endowments. And as for you, Aubrey—upon my honour, I've often listened with great satisfaction to you in the House; few ever made clearer statements of facts, or reasoned more closely and cogently than you did; with practice, you would have become a formidable debater. In your new profession you will find *facts* become quite different things; flexible, elastic, accommodating—you may do anything with them—twist, and turn, and combine; ha! ha! Aubrey!" [Here the Attorney-General laughed in the plenitude of his own conscious power.] "In a word, Aubrey, if you determine to get on at the bar, you will; and if you can but get a bit of a start at beginning; now, for instance, there's Runningtons' house—one of the very first in London—why if they would push you—your fortune's made. But you must make up your mind to wait a little: you can't get into a great business by a hop, step, and a jump, believe me. Certainly I have no cause to be dissatisfied; I've done pretty well: but I can tell you that eight years passed over me before I earned enough a-year to pay my laundress! With me, accident supplied the place of *connection*: but only suppose how I must have worked in the mean time to be able to do business when it came to me! I know it's said that I was always an idle man; but people were a good deal mistaken about that matter, I can promise them! What *idiots*, indeed, to suppose such a thing! Why, my very first start lifted me into a business of a thousand a-year; and in the name of common sense, how could I have got through it, if I hadn't worked beforehand? Bah!—Now, if Runningtons' will stand by you, I'll guarantee your making £500 your first year! and if they *won't*, why, don't despair, you'll have to wait a little longer; but it will come at last, depend on it, if you continue on the look-out! Besides, you can help me a little bit, eh? It will be a sort of introduction, you know; but we've time enough to see about that.—I recommend you to get at once into the chambers of some hard-working man, with a good deal of general business, particularly Pleading—let me see"—Here the Attorney-General paused and stroked his chin for a moment or two in a musing manner, "Ah, yes, there's Weasel, the very man for your purpose. He's a good pleader, and a neat draftsman; gets through his work very *cleanly*—ah! Weasel's a clear-headed pains-taking man—all for law; and he's got a good deal of it. He's not a very polished person, Weasel, ha! ha! but he's an honourable, right-minded man—shall I introduce you? Well, by and by, I'll walk over with you.—As to books? oh! why—I suppose you've looked into Blackstone? He's a fine fellow Blackstone, and deserves all that has been said in his praise. Many think that he's only to be glanced at, at the beginning of their studies; never believe it! He's good to the end of the chapter! I've a profound respect for Blackstone; it's the only book I've read four or five times through—ay, from cover to cover; he makes law lovely! Stick to Black-

stone by all means ! Reeve's—oh ! I mentioned *him*, you know. Then I should go, I think, to Coke on Littleton ; but we shall have several opportunities of talking over *these* matters. I really believe, Aubrey, that you are doing a very wise thing in coming to the bar. If you've health, and the average opportunities (though I think you will have *more*), I'll undertake to say that in a few years' time you will realize an income—which *may* be a great one—but which (whatever it may be) you'll *earn*, as you did not the one you've lost ; and you'll enjoy it, Aubrey, ten thousand times more ! All that I can do for you, in every way, I will—command me ! By the way," he added, assuming a somewhat anxious expression of countenance, and a manner very different from the free, buoyant, off-hand manner in which, for the last twenty minutes, he had been speaking (Aubrey feeling all the while the easy commanding power and simplicity of the splendid intellect with which he was communing), "I'm almost afraid to ask ; but how do you come on, about the—Mesne Profits ?"

"I have heard nothing whatever about them, as yet," replied Aubrey, sighing ; his face suddenly overshadowed with gloom. A moment's pause ensued ; which was interrupted by the Attorney-General saying, in a very earnest and feeling manner, "I hope to God you'll be able to get some favourable arrangement made ! You've not seen anything of Mr. Titmouse's attorneys, I suppose ?" "Oh, no ! nor heard anything from them." "I've had very little to do with them ; Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—these are the people, eh ?" Mr. Aubrey nodded. "Quirk is a stubborn wooden-headed fellow—an old hedgehog ? Egad ! that man's compounded more felonies, the old scamp, than any man in England ! I should like to have him in the witness-box for a couple of hours, or so ! I think I'd tickle him a little," said the Attorney-General, with a bitter smile. "They say he's a confidential adviser to a sort of Thieves' Association. But there's Gammon : I've had several things to do with *him*. He is a superior man, that Gammon ; a very superior man. A keen dog ! I recollect him being the principal witness in a cause when I was for the plaintiff ; and he completely baffled Subtle—ah, ha, how well I recollect it !—Subtle lost his temper at last, because he couldn't make Gammon lose *his* ! Ah, how cleverly the fellow twisted and turned with Subtle for nearly an hour ! ah, ha—Subtle looked so chagrined !—Have you seen Mr. Gammon ?" "No, I've had no occasion." "He has a pleasing, gentlemanlike appearance ; rather a striking face. *He's* the man you'll have to deal with in any negotiations on the subject I have named. You must mind what you're about with him. You mustn't think me intrusive, Aubrey ; but have they sent in their bill yet ?"

Mr. Aubrey involuntarily shuddered, as he answered in the negative.

"I'd give a trifle to know how the plague such people ever came to be concerned in such a case. 'Tis quite out of their way which is in the criminal line of business !—They'll make their client pay for it through the nose, I warrant him !—By the way, what an inconceivably ridiculous little ass that Titmouse is—I saw him in court at York. If he'd only go on the stage, and act *naturally*, he'd make his fortune as a fool !"—Mr. Aubrey faintly smiled at this sally ; but the topics which the Attorney-General had just before touched upon, had not a little oppressed his spirits.

"As this is comparatively an idle day with me," said the Attorney General, "and I've got ten minutes more at your service—suppose I go with you at once—nothing like the present moment—to Mr. Weasel's ?"

"I am greatly obliged to you," replied Aubrey—and both rose to go. "Say I shall be back in a few minutes," said the Attorney-General, in answer to his clerk, who reminded him, as he passed the clerk's door, that Mr. Serjeant Squelch and Mr. Putty would be there in a moment or two's time. As they crossed the court—"How do you do, Mr. Putty ?" said the Attorney-General,

with lofty civility, to a grinning little confident personage who met him, exclaiming with flippant familiarity, "How do you do, Mr. Attorney?—Coming to your chambers—you don't forget?—Consultation—eh?"

"I perfectly recollect it, Mr. Putty, I shall return presently"—replied the Attorney-General, somewhat stiffly, and passed on, arm-in-arm with Mr. Aubrey.

"Now, that forward little imp's name, Aubrey, is *Putty*," whispered the Attorney-General. "He was a glazier by trade; but just as he finished his apprenticeship, an uncle left him a few hundred pounds, with which—would you believe it?—nothing would suit him but decking himself in a wig and gown, and coming to the bar—ah, ha!—The fellow's creeping, however, into a little business, positively! They say he has a cousin who is one of the officers to the Sheriff of Middlesex, and puts a good many little things in his way! He's my junior in a criminal information against a newspaper, for charging his father-in-law—a baker, who supplies some workhouse with bread—with making it of only one-third flour, one-third rye, and the remainder *saw-dust*—ah, ha, ha!—I dared hardly look at the judges while I moved the Rule *Nisi*, for fear of laughing! This is the case in which we're going to have the consultation he spoke of—but here's Mr. Weasel's." They mounted a narrow dingy-looking well-worn staircase—and on the first floor, beheld "Mr. Weasel" painted over the door. On the Attorney-General knocking, as soon as his clear silvery voice was heard asking for Mr. Weasel, and his dignified figure had been recognised by the clerk, who had one pen in his mouth, and another behind his ear—that humble functionary suddenly bent himself almost double three or four times; and with flustered obsequiousness assured the great man that Mr. Weasel was quite at liberty. The next moment the Attorney-General and Mr. Aubrey were introduced into Mr. Weasel's room—a small dusky room, wretchedly furnished, the walls lined with book-shelves, well filled—and the table at which he was writing, and a chair on each side of him, strewn with draft paper, which he was covering at a prodigious rate. He was a bachelor, upwards of forty; was of spare make, of low stature, had a thin, sharp, sawn face, and short stiff black hair; there was an appearance about the eyes as if they were half-blinded with being incessantly directed to white paper; he had a furrowed forehead, a small pursed-up mouth—one hardly knew why, but really there was something about his look that instantly suggested to you the image of the creature whose name he bore. He was a ravenous lawyer, darting at the point and pith of every case he was concerned in, and sticking to it—just as would his blood-thirsty namesake at the neck of a rabbit. In *law* he lived, moved, and had his being. In his dreams he was everlastingly spinning out pleadings which he never could understand, and hunting for cases which he could not discover. In the daytime, however, he was more successful. In fact, everything he saw, heard, or read of—wherever he was, whatever he was doing, suggested to him questions of law that might arise out of it. At his sister's wedding (whither he had not gone without reluctance) he got into a wrangle with the bridegroom, on a question started by himself, whether an *infant* was liable for goods supplied to his wife before marriage; at his grandmother's funeral he got into an intricate discussion with a puzzled proctor about *bona notabilia*, with reference to a pair of horn spectacles, which the venerable deceased had left behind her in Scotland, and a poodle in the Isle of Man; and at church, the reading of the parable of the *Unjust Steward*, set his devout, ingenious, and fertile mind at work for the remainder of the service, as to the modes of stating the case now-a-days against the offender, and whether it would be more advisable to proceed civilly or criminally; and if the former, at law or in equity. He was a hard-headed man; very clear and acute, and accurate in his legal knowledge; every other sort of knowledge

he despised, if, indeed, he had more than the faintest hearsay knowledge of its existence. He was a Cambridge man; and there had read nothing but mathematics, in which he had made a decent figure. As soon as he had taken his degree, he migrated to the Temple, where he had ever since continued engaged in the study, and then the successful practice, of the law, as a special pleader under the bar. He had a very large business, which he got through ably and rapidly. He scarcely ever went into society; early want of opportunity for doing so, had at length given him a want of inclination for it—to say nothing of his want of time. When, as was seldom the case, he ventured out for a walk, he went, muttering to himself, at a postman's pace, to get the greatest quantity of exercise, in the smallest space of time. He was not a bad-tempered man, but had become nervous, fidgety, and irritable. His tone of voice was feeble, his utterance hesitating, his manner hurried. What a laughable contrast between him and his visitor! The Attorney-General coming to Mr. Weasel's chambers, suggested the idea of a magnificent mastiff suddenly poking his head into the little kennel of a querulous pug-dog; and I suppose Mr. Aubrey might be likened to a greyhound accompanying the aforesaid mastiff! On seeing his visitors, Mr. Weasel instantly got up, with a blush of surprise, and a little hurry and embarrassment of manner. His clerk put out a couple of chairs, and down they sat. The Attorney-General came to the point in about half a minute, and the matter was very quickly settled; it being arranged that within a day or two's time, as soon as the forms necessary for admitting Mr. Aubrey to an Inn of Court should have been completed, he should commence his attendance at Mr. Weasel's, from ten o'clock till five, daily.

"It's a comical looking little animal, isn't it?" quoth the Attorney-General, with a laugh, as soon as they had got out of hearing. "Certainly, I don't feel particularly prepossessed——" "Oh, pho! He's the very man for you—the very man. There's no nonsense with Weasel; you may learn an infinite deal of law from him, and that is all you want. He's a very inoffensive fellow; and I've no doubt you'll soon like his chambers greatly, if you're in earnest in studying the law. You go or not, of course, as you choose; whatever you do is perfectly voluntary; pay him his hundred guineas, and then, if you like, you may get many thousand pounds' worth out of him in the twelvemonth. Now, I *must* bid you good morning—I've really not another moment to spare. God bless you, my dear Aubrey; and," he added with great kindness, and a very pointed manner, "whenever you may think it worth your while to talk over your affairs with me, come without notice or ceremony—wherever I may be, I shall be delighted to see you!" Then they parted. Mr. Aubrey was not aware of a certain stroke of delicacy and generosity on the part of the Attorney-General; viz., that immediately on the *Rule* being discharged, he had sent for Mr. Runnington, and insisted on returning every sixpence of his fees—upwards of six hundred guineas—desiring that Mr. Aubrey should not be made acquainted with it, if by any means Messrs. Runnington could conceal it from him!

A little fatigued and harassed by several important matters, which kept him engaged till a late hour in the afternoon, he reached Vivian Street in a depressed and desponding mood. Just as he turned the corner, he beheld, at about twenty yards' distance, Mrs. Aubrey and Miss Aubrey slowly walking homeward, on their return from the Park. Mrs. Aubrey held Charles by the hand, who was dancing and frisking wildly about, and Miss Aubrey's beautiful little Cato she was leading along by a slender chain. They were in half-mourning; there was such an air of elegant simplicity about them—their figures, their carriage, so easy and graceful! Aubrey, as he neared them, gazed at them with mingled feelings of pride and tenderness.

"Oh, my papa! my papa!" suddenly exclaimed Charles, who, happening to turn round, had caught sight of his father, and ran eagerly down to him: with what a thrill of love did he take in his arms the beautiful breathless boy, and how his heart yearned towards his wife and sister, as they also turned quickly round to meet him, after a long day's absence! How inexpressibly dear were they to him—how, that day, he enjoyed their quiet little dinner-table—the romp with his children afterwards—and a long evening of eager and interesting conversation, after the little ones had gone to bed, Mrs. Aubrey and Kate busy the while with some slight matter of needlework! They had received several letters from Yorkshire, which they read to him. One was from poor Dr. Tatham, who, though he concealed a good deal that would have occasioned needless pain, yet gave them a melancholy notion of the altered state of things at the Hall. Though it was rather late before they retired to rest on the evening of the ensuing Sunday, Mr. Aubrey was to be found seated in his study by half-past four on Monday morning, perusing, with profound attention, stimulated by the strong observation of the Attorney-General, the second volume of Blackstone's Commentaries—a work with which he had already a very tolerable familiarity. The way in which he parcelled out his time was this: From the time that he entered his study till breakfast-time, he resolved to read law—from ten o'clock till four or five, was to be spent at Mr. Weasel's chambers—and the evenings were to be devoted to the society of his children, his wife, and sister, and also to certain occasional literary efforts, from which he hoped to derive some little increase to his means. This was severe work; but it was probably the most fortunate and salutary thing in the world for Aubrey, that his energies should be thus occupied, and his mind kept from the corroding effects of constant reflection upon his misfortunes, and dismal apprehensions concerning the future. After he had spent a few days in Mr. Weasel's chambers, a good deal of his prejudice against that gentleman began to wear off. Mr. Aubrey found him all that the Attorney-General had described him as being—a very acute and able lawyer, with a constant current of important, varied, and instructive business running through his chambers, and every disposition to render his utmost assistance to Mr. Aubrey, whom he quickly found out to be a man of very superior intellect, and most seriously bent upon acquiring a knowledge of the profession. Mr. Weasel was not blessed with the power of formally communicating elementary knowledge; Mr. Aubrey had, as it were, to *extract* from him what he wanted, with something like a painful effort. The advantages of his position were the innumerable practical hints and suggestions as to the mode of dealing with miscellaneous business, which he derived from a watchful attention to whatever passed in chambers—to the mode in which Weasel hunted up and applied his law, and reduced the facts involved in litigation into legal shape and language, in the process of pleading. The penetrating eye of Mr. Aubrey, thus closely fixed on everything that came under his notice, quickly began to discover and appreciate the good sense, the practical utility of most of the positive rules of law which he saw in operation; and at the end of a fortnight or three weeks, he began to feel interest in the study upon which he had so vigorously entered, and in which he felt himself making real progress. Mr. Weasel, during even that time, perceived the prodigious superiority of Mr. Aubrey over another pupil, who had nearly completed his second year in Mr. Weasel's chambers, after a twelvemonth spent in a conveyancer's; not of course, in respect of legal knowledge, but of intellectual power and aptitude for business.—Mr. Aubrey would return to Vivian Street about six o'clock each day, a little fatigued with a very long day's work (for he was never later than five o'clock in entering his study in the morning); but quickly cheered and refreshed by the sight of the fond and lovely beings whom he there rejoined,

and who had been counting the very minutes till he returned. Every day knit that little family together, if possible, in stronger bonds of love; for they clung to each other with a feeling of having been thrust out of the great gay world together, and sent, as it were, upon a pilgrimage afar, amidst scenes of increasing gloom, difficulty, and danger. Every day that bore them further from their expulsion from Yatton, as it were, mellowed their recollections of past scenes, and poured upon their wounded feelings the soothing balm of pious resignation; and sometimes, also faint and trembling beams of hope concerning the future, would steal across the gloomy chambers of their hearts. Thank God, the view of the past presented to them no occasion for shame, for remorse, for self-condemnation! Their straitened circumstances—an honourable poverty—had been a burden light, indeed, to bear. They were very happy in one another's company; their house, though small, was convenient, and even elegantly comfortable; they had health; Mr. Aubrey had constant exercise for an active and vigorous mind, in the acquisition of the learning of a noble profession, the practice of which might possibly hereafter raise all of them to even affluence and distinction—at all events, might secure them the substantial comforts of life. But Mr. Aubrey would have moments of heaviness and trepidation. When engaged in his little study, in the profound solitude and silence of the early morning, while he was thus training his faculties to their utmost, on behalf of the sweet innocent beings—his wife—his children—his sister—sleeping above, he would sometimes lean back in his chair, with a very deep sigh, and sink into a reverie—oh, how sad and painful!—deepening occasionally into agony; but he would suddenly arouse himself, and resume his studies with a powerful effort at abstraction—with additional intensity of application. How could he be otherwise than momentarily *paralysed*, when he surveyed his alarming and tremendous pecuniary liabilities? Bills of costs—Heaven only knew to what amount—due to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; to his own attorneys, Messrs. Runnington; and to Mr. Parkinson: and then—sickening and fearful object!—the *Mesne Profits*—what *was* to become of them all? The mind that, in the presence of such disturbing forces as these, could apply its energies so successfully as did that of Mr. Aubrey to the acquisition of knowledge, with any degree of calmness, must surely have been of no common order, and have undergone no slight discipline; but, alas! alas! what could all this have availed him, unless he had been vouchsafed assistance from on high?

They were sitting one morning at their usual early and simple breakfast, and Mr. Aubrey was reading aloud, for his wife and sister's suggestions, a second article which he had commenced overnight, designed for one of the *Reviews*—having about a fortnight before sent off his first effort, about which, however, he had as yet heard nothing; and Kate was playfully patting his cheek, and telling him that, for all he might say to the contrary, a particular expression was not, in her opinion, "*elegant English*!"

"It is you pert puss of a critic," insisted Aubrey, with a good-natured laugh; and then, turning to Mrs. Aubrey, "What do *you* say, Agnes?" "Oh—why—I really like it very much as it is." "I sha'n't alter it," said Aubrey, laughing. "Then I'll alter it when you're gone," quoth Kate with affected pertness, and bringing her beautiful laughing face so near his own, with a kind of air of defiance, that he kissed her forehead, and said it should be as she chose.

Just then a knock at the door announced a visitor, who proved to be Mr. Runnington. Why it was they hardly knew; but they all slightly changed colour. He had called so early, he said, to ensure seeing Mr. Aubrey before he went to the Temple! and, though he had been shown into the study, Mr. Aubrey insisted on his joining the breakfast table. "We've very plain fare for you, however," said he, as Mr. Runnington yielded to his wishes.

Mr. Aubrey perceived, with some uneasiness, that the kind and thoughtful countenance of Mr. Runnington wore rather an anxious expression. And indeed so it was. When he looked at those who sat before him—lovely, elegant, yet with a plainly forced cheerfulness—reflected on the sufferings which they had passed through, and that which was in store for them—and for the first bitter instalment of which he had come to prepare Mr. Aubrey—could he but feel very deep sympathy for them? As soon as he had retired with Mr. Aubrey to the study, in a low tone he informed Mr. Aubrey of his errand, which was to apprise him that, the evening before, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's bill had come in.

"Well, show it me, if you please," said Mr. Aubrey calmly, extending his hand. "My dear sir, why do you suppose I have it *with me*?" inquired Mr. Runnington with a concerned air. "You are not accustomed to such matters—God forbid you should! It is too bulky for me to have brought with me, and lies at our office!" "What is the *amount* of it, then?" inquired Mr. Aubrey, dreading to hear the answer; while Mr. Runnington took out of his pocket-book a slip of paper, which he handed to Mr. Aubrey, and on which the latter read—"£3,946 14s. 6d." He gazed at it for some moments in silence, and became very pale. Mr. Runnington could hardly bear to look at him, and think of the two lovely women in the adjoining room, who were so fearfully interested in the intelligence which had so dismayed Mr. Aubrey.

"This is a very—large—amount," said he, at length, with forced calmness. "It is a most serious affair," replied Mr. Runnington, shaking his head and sighing. "Then there is yours—and Mr. Parkinson's." "Oh Mr. Aubrey—*sufficient for the day is the evil thereof*." "Will you oblige me by saying what is the probable amount of *your* bill?" inquired Mr. Aubrey, with a calmness which seemed lent to him by despair. "Oh! I assure you we have thought nothing at all about it, nor shall we for some time to come, Mr. Aubrey. We have not the slightest intention of troubling ourselves, or you, with the matter till you may be in a position to attend to it without serious inconvenience." "But *do* favour me with something like a *notion*," pressed the unhappy Aubrey. "Why—perhaps I am hardly doing right in mentioning it; but whenever our bill is sent in, it will be less by some six hundred and fifty pounds, by the noble generosity of the Attorney-General, who has returned all his fees—"

"Returned all his fees!" echoed Mr. Aubrey starting, while the colour rushed into his cheek, and the expression of his countenance was of pride struggling with astonishment, and gratitude, and admiration. He exquisitely appreciated the conduct of his distinguished friend; and at the same time felt a totally new and very painful sense of pecuniary obligation.

"I feel, Mr. Aubrey, that I have broken my promise to the Attorney-General, who extracted from me a solemn pledge, to endeavour so to manage the matter as that you should never know it. What is it, after all—noble as it is—to the Attorney-General, with his £12,000 or £15,000 a-year?"

"Oh—do not talk so, Mr. Runnington; I am overpowered, oppressed. Never in all my life have I experienced feelings like those with which I am now agitated!" He rose, and stood opposite the window for a few minutes—neither of them speaking. Then he returned to his seat. "How much does that leave me your debtor?" "Why—really it is hard to say, unprepared—I should imagine that our account is reduced to some £1,500 or £1,600—about which

"Then there is Mr. Parkinson's," said Aubrey in a low tone, but with a desperate air; presently adding—"Here are some £6,000 or £7,000 to start with; and *then* we come to the *mesne* profits—gracious, gracious God!" he suddenly added, with a visible shudder. He folded his arms convulsively, and gazed for a second or two, at Mr. Runnington, with an eye whose expression was

overpowering. In his face Mr. Runnington beheld no longer the mild and melancholy expression to which he had been accustomed, but a sternness and power were apparent in his features, which Mr. Runnington had not imagined them capable of exhibiting. They told of a strong soul thoroughly roused, and excited, and in agony. At that moment a knocking was heard at the door, as of very little fingers. "Come in!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, with unusual quickness and sternness. The door was gently opened, and Charles's little face peeped into the room timidly, quite startled by the tone in which he had been addressed. "Come in, my child!" said Mr. Aubrey, rather tremulously when he saw that it was *his son*, and observed the apprehensiveness overspreading his little features. Charles immediately advanced with a serious submissive air, saying—"This letter is just come—Mamma sent me with it, dear papa —"

"Give it me, Charles," said Mr. Aubrey, extending his hand for it, while with the other he gently placed the child upon his lap, and kissed him. "I'm not angry with you, Charles," said he tenderly. "I've not been naughty, you know dear papa?" said he with innocent surprise, "No, no, my little love."

The ruined *father* could say no more; but putting aside the child's flowing curly locks from his temples, as it were mechanically, he gazed on his little face for a moment, and then folded him in his arms with unspeakable tenderness. Mr. Runnington rose, and stood for some moments gazing through the window, unwilling that his own emotion should be observed. When Mr. Aubrey opened the letter, it proved to be from the publisher of the *Review* to which he had sent his article, enclosing a cheque for forty guineas, expressing an earnest desire that he would continue his contributions, and assuring him that the editor considered the article "in every way admirable." As soon as he had glanced over the letter—"You little messenger of hope and mercy!" he thought, again kissing his son, who sat passively gazing at the agitated countenance of his *father*—"I cannot, I will not despair! You have brought me, as it were, a ray of light from heaven, piercing the fearful gloom of my situation: 'tis a token, surely, that I am not forgotten: I feel as though an angel, momentarily brightening the night of sorrow, had come and whispered in my ear—'*courage!*'" His features began to resume their natural serenity of expression. "Take it in to your mamma," said he, kissing little Charles, and despatching him with the letter.

Shortly afterwards, as soon as he had recovered the command of his manner sufficiently to avoid occasioning uneasiness to Mrs. and Miss Aubrey, he proposed to Mr. Runnington that they should walk towards the Temple; and bidding adieu to those whom he left behind him, without giving them an opportunity to ask him as to the nature of Mr. Runnington's errand but leaving them in high spirits at the letter which he had sent in to them, he quitted the house arm-in-arm with Mr. Runnington. I am persuaded that if that gentleman had had no one to consult, he would have relieved Mr. Aubrey altogether from liability to *him*; but he had four partners; their own pecuniary outlay had been considerable; and, therefore, the thing was really out of the question. As they walked along, in the course of much anxious conversation, Mr. Runnington told Mr. Aubrey that he considered Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's bill to be extortionate; and that it might on taxation—a process which he explained to Mr. Aubrey—be reduced, probably, by at least *one-half*. But he also reminded Mr. Aubrey of the power which they held in their hands, in respect of the mesne profits; and intimated his opinion, that in all probability they had made out their bill with an eye to such considerations—namely that it should be discharged without rigorous scrutiny into its constituent items, before they would listen to any terms whatever for the payment of the mesne profits; and that Mr. Aubrey's position, with respect to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, was one which required the greatest

possible deliberation and circumspection on his part, especially in the matter of the bill just delivered in by them.

"I see! The whole," said Mr. Aubrey, "comes to this; they will relieve me from liability to Mr. Titmouse, for as much of what may be due to him, as they can divert into their own pockets!"

"That certainly seems very much like it," replied Mr. Runnington, shrugging his shoulders, "but you will leave all such considerations and matters to us; and rely on our honour and our discretion. At what may appear to us the exact moment for doing so with effect, depend upon our most cautious interference. We know, Mr. Aubrey, the kind of people we have to deal with. Mr. Titmouse is very likely to be merely a puppet in their hands—at least in those of Mr. Gammon, who is a very long-headed man, and with whom, I have no doubt, our negotiations will have to be carried on."

"That is just what the Attorney-General said, and he invited me, moreover, to converse with him, whenever I might consider that his advice would be useful."

"Could you have a better adviser! He has a most penetrating sagacity, long exercised—in short, his qualifications are consummate; and I should not hesitate about consulting him whenever we feel at a loss."

"Why should I disguise anything from you, Mr. Runnington?" said Aubrey, "you ought to know the exact state of my affairs. I have a little family plate, which I could not bear to part with; my books, and the remnants of the furniture at Yatton, which I have saved in order to furnish our present residence. Besides this, the outside of all that I am possessed of—and I have no expectations, nor has my wife nor my poor sister, from any quarter—is a sum of about £3,000 in the funds, and £423 at my banker's. Those are my circumstances; they appal me in merely stating them. Why, I owe double the sum I have named for lawyers' bills only. I have not enough, without parting with my books and plate, to discharge even Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's bill!"

"It would be cruel and absurd in me not to express at once, Mr. Aubrey, my conviction that your situation is fearfully critical, and that your sole hope is in the treatment which may be expected from Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, and their client, Mr. Titmouse. Serious as are, at present, your other liabilities, to that one they are but as a bucket of water to the Thames. As we are talking, Mr. Aubrey, in this candid and unrestrained manner, I will tell you my chief source of apprehension on your account, with reference to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; namely, that they may possibly speculate on your being able, if placed in real peril, to call around you in your extremity a host of wealthy and powerful friends, as security, or otherwise——"

"They will find themselves, then, utterly mistaken. If they and their client are really capable of such shocking brutality—such wanton oppression—let them do their worst: I am resigned. Providence will find out a shelter for my wife and children, and my dear, devoted, high-spirited sister; and, as for myself, rather than satiate the rapacity of such wretches, by plundering good-natured and generous friends, I will end my days in prison."

Mr. Aubrey was evidently not a little excited when he said this; but there was that in his tone of voice, and in his eye, which told Mr. Runnington that he meant what he said; and that, as soon as it should have come to, the point of oppression and injustice, no man could resist more powerfully, or endure with a more dignified and inflexible resolution. But Mr. Runnington would fain hope that it would not come to such an issue. He consoled Mr. Aubrey with assurances that, as for their own demand, it might stand over for several years; and that so, he was sure, would it be with the far lesser demand of Mr. Parkinson; and that if, by a great effort, sufficient could be raised to,

discharge promptly the bill of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, some much more favourable arrangement respecting the amount and mode of payment of the mesne profits might be effected—leaving Mr. Aubrey, in the mean time, leisure to apply himself vigorously to the studies for the bar, for which Mr. Runnington assured him that he considered him peculiarly qualified; and pledged himself to back him with all the influence he had, or could command.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN Mr. Aubrey arrived at Mr. Weasel's chambers, he looked dejected and harassed, but, with a noble effort of self-command, at once addressed himself calmly and vigorously to the duties of the day. From time to time he peremptorily excluded the harassing thoughts and recollections arising out of his morning's interview with Mr. Runnington; and succeeded in concentrating his attention upon a case of more than usual intricacy and multifariousness of details, which Mr. Weasel having glanced over, had laid aside for a more leisurely perusal. He handed it, however, to Mr. Aubrey soon after his arrival, with something approaching to a secret satisfaction, in the expectation of its "proving too much for him;" but he was mistaken. Mr. Aubrey left a little earlier than usual, but not before he had sent in the voluminous "case" to Mr. Weasel's room by the clerk, together with a half-sheet of draft paper, containing a brief summary of the results at which he had arrived, and which not a little surprised Mr. Weasel. The case did not happen to involve much technical knowledge, but in respect of the imperfect manner in which it was drawn up, and the confusion worse confounded of the transactions themselves, out of which the questions arose, required patient persevering attention, strength of memory, and great clear-headedness. In short, Weasel owned to himself that poor Aubrey had taken a very masterly view of the case.

"Have you read Aubrey's opinion on that troublesome case—I mean the Cornish Bank?" inquired Weasel, taking a pinch of snuff, of Mr. Thoroughpace, another pupil who had just taken his seat beside Mr. Weasel, to see him "settle" [*i.e.*, score out, interline, and alter] a pleading drawn out by the aforesaid Thoroughpace. That gentleman replied in the negative. "He's got a head-piece of his, I can tell you. Egad, somehow or another, he always contrives to hit the nail on the head."

"I'd a sort of notion, the very first day he came, that he was a superior man," replied Thoroughpace. "He makes very few notes—seems to trust entirely to his head"—"Ah! a man may carry that too far," interrupted Mr. Weasel, thrusting a pinch of snuff up his nose. "Then I wish I could," replied Thoroughpace. "Isn't there such a thing as making the hand engross the business of the head?" Mr. Weasel—recollecting that in his library stood twelve thick folio volumes of manuscript "precedents," which he had been fool enough to copy out with his own hand during his pupillage, and the first year or two of his setting up in business—hemmed, and again applied to his snuff-box. "How do you get on with him in the pupils' room?" he inquired.

"Why, I didn't like him at the first. Very reserved, and has a little *hauteur*. Even now, though very courteous, he says little, seems entirely absorbed by his studies, and yet to have something or other on his mind." "Ah! I dare say! Law's no trifle, I warrant him! No doubt it's *teasing* him!" replied Weasel, rather complacently. "By Jove! but I don't think it *does*. I never saw a man to whom it seemed to *yield* so easily.—He's a particularly *gentlemanlike* person, by the way; and there's something very attractive in his countenance.

He seems highly connected. I've seen several notes come here for him with coronets on the seals, and several well-known——"

"Oh—why, you've heard of the great cause of *Doe d. Titmouse v. Jolter*, a Yorkshire ejectment case, tried only last Spring assizes? Well, he's the defendant, and has, I hear, lost everything." "You astonish me! By Jove, but he had need work!"

"Shall *we* set to work, Mr. Thoroughpace?" said Weasel suddenly, looking at his watch lying on his desk. "I've promised to let them have this plea by six o'clock—or the other side will be signing judgment;" and plunging his pen into the inkstand, to work he went, *more suo*, as if such a man as his pupil Mr. Aubrey had never existed. He was not at all a hard-hearted man; but I believe that if a *capias ad satisfaciendum* (*i. e.*, final process to take the body into custody) against Charles Aubrey, Esquire, had come into Mr. Weasel's chambers to settle, as requiring special accuracy—after humming and hawing a bit—and taking an extra pinch of snuff, he would have settled it, marked his *seven-and-sixpence* in the corner, and set it out with other papers, consoling himself with this just reflection, that the thing *must* be done by *somebody*! and he might as well have the *fee* as any one else!

On Mr. Aubrey's return home to dinner, he found that his sister had received another long letter from Dr. Tatham, to which was appended a postscript mentioning Mr. Gammon in such terms as suggested to Mr. Aubrey a little scheme which he resolved to carry into effect on the morrow—namely to call himself at the office of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, and seek an interview with Mr. Gammon, who, Dr. Tatham stated, had quitted Yatton for town only the day before the Doctor had written to Miss Aubrey. After a very restless and unhappy night, during which he was tormented with all kinds of dismal dreams, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap figuring in each as the stern and mysterious arbiters of his earthly destiny, he resolved to put an end to his present insupportable suspense—to learn at once the extent of what he had either to hope or to fear—by calling that very afternoon at Saffron Hill. For that purpose, he quitted Mr. Weasel's at the early hour of three o'clock; and straightway bent his steps through Fetter Lane to Hatton Garden, and thence inquired his way to Saffron Hill. He was not long in finding the house of which he was in quest, his eye being soon attracted by the great, gleaming brass-plate with "Quirk, Gammon, and Snap," as prominent and threatening as ever those names had appeared to Titmouse in the day of his agony and suspense. Mr. Aubrey, with a jaded air, dressed in a buttoned black surtout, and with an umbrella under his arm, entered the hall, where were sitting and standing several strange looking people—one or two suffering evidently great agitation; in fact, relatives of prisoners whose trials for capital offences were coming on the next day at Newgate—and made his way into a room, on the door of which he read "Clerk's Room."

"Now, sir, your business?" said a showily dressed Jewish-looking youth, lolling at a desk from which he did not move, and speaking in a tone of very disagreeable assurance. "Is Mr. Gammon within?" inquired Mr. Aubrey, taking off his hat; and there was a certain something in his voice, countenance, and bearing, that induced the personage he addressed to slip off his stool, and exhibit as courteous an air as he could possibly assume. "Mr. Gammon is in his room, sir, and alone. I believe he is rather busy, but I've no doubt you can see him."

The fact was, that at that moment Mr. Gammon was engaged drawing up "Instructions to prepare Declaration" in an action for mesne profits, against Mr. Aubrey! He had only the day before returned from Yatton, where circumstances had occurred which had quickened their intended proceeding against Mr. Aubrey—as the first quarter to which, at Mr. Titmouse's suggestion,

they were to look for a considerable supply of ready money. That morning, in the very room into which Mr. Aubrey was to be presently shown, had taken place a long discussion between Mr. Quirk and Mr. Gammon, on the subject which had now brought to their office Mr. Aubrey. Mr. Quirk was for making short work of it—for “going straight a-head”—and getting the whole £60,000, or security for the greater portion, and £20,000 down! Gammon, however, was of opinion that that was mere madness; that by attempting to proceed to extremities against so unfortunate a sufferer as Mr. Aubrey, they could not fail of drawing down on themselves and their client universal execration; and, moreover, of driving Mr. Aubrey desperate, and forcing him either to quit the country, or accept the protection of the insolvent laws. He had, at length, satisfied Mr. Quirk that their only chance was in gentleness and moderation: and the old gentleman had, as usual, agreed to adopt the plan of operations suggested by Gammon. The latter personage had quite as keen a desire and firm determination as the former, to wring out of their wretched victim the very last farthing that there was the slightest probability of obtaining, for Titmouse had pointed to that quarter for the discharge of his ten thousand pound bond to the firm, and also their bill of costs to him (which contained some three hundred items, slightly varied in language, that there was also charged in their bill to Mr. Aubrey); then twenty—or at least fifteen thousand pounds, were to be handed over to himself, Titmouse; and all the rest that could be got, Mr. Gammon might appropriate to his own use. His inquiries into Mr. Aubrey's circumstances, had completely convinced him that it would be impossible to extract any considerable sum from that unfortunate gentleman; and that if they could contrive to get their bill paid, perhaps substantial security for four or five thousand of the mesne profits, and his own personal security for the payment of any portion of the remainder, hereafter—they had better rest satisfied—and look for liquidation of their own heavy claim to a mortgage upon the Yatton estates. Mr. Gammon had also proposed to himself certain other objects, in dealing with Mr. Aubrey, than the mere extraction of money from him; and, in short, prompted by considerations, such as those above intimated, he had come to the determination, an hour or so before Mr. Aubrey's most unexpected visit, to be at once prepared with the necessary means for setting in motion legal proceedings for the recovery of the arrear of mesne profits.

“Have I the honour to address Mr. Gammon?” commenced Mr. Aubrey courteously, on being shown into the room—not announced by name—where Gammon sat busily engaged writing out the “Instructions” for framing the rack on which it was designed to extend the as yet unconscious Aubrey.

“Sir, my name is Gammon,” he replied, colouring a little—rising from his chair, with an expression of very great surprise—“I believe I have the honour of seeing Mr. Aubrey?—I beg you will allow me to offer you a chair”—he continued, placing one as far as he could from the table, and then, getting another, he sat down between Mr. Aubrey and the table; expecting to hear his visitor at once open the subject of their bill, which they had so recently sent in.

“Will you suffer me, Mr. Aubrey,” commenced Gammon, with a bland and subdued air, not fulsome, but extremely deferential, “before entering on any business which may have brought you here, to express deep and sincere sympathy with your sufferings, and my *personal* regret at the share we have had in the proceedings which have ended so adversely for your interests? But our duty as professional men, Mr. Aubrey, is often as plain as painful!”

“I feel obliged, sir, for your kind expressions of sympathy; but I cannot for a moment conceive any apology necessary. Neither I nor my advisers have ever had cause to complain of harsh or unprofessional treatment on your

part. Your proceedings certainly came upon me—upon all of us—like a thunder-stroke,” said Mr. Aubrey with a subdued sigh. “I trust that you have given me credit, Mr. Gammon, for offering no vexatious or unconscientious obstacles.”

“Oh, Mr. Aubrey! on the contrary, I am at a loss for words to express my sense of your straightforward and high-minded conduct; and have several times intimated my sentiments on that subject to Messrs. Runnington’s,”—Mr. Aubrey bowed—“and again anxiously beg that you will give me credit for feeling the profoundest sympathy”—he paused, as if from emotion; and such might well have been excited by the appearance of Mr. Aubrey—calm and melancholy—his face full of anxiety and exhaustion, and his figure, naturally slender, evidently somewhat emaciated.

[“I wonder,” thought Gammon, “whether he has any *insurances on his life*. He certainly has *rather* a consumptive look; how could one ascertain whether he has insured? And where?”]

“I trust, most sincerely, Mr. Aubrey, that the mental sufferings you must have undergone have not affected your health?” inquired Gammon, with an air of infinite concern. “A little, but, thank God, not materially; I never was very robust,” he replied, with a faint sad smile. [“*How like his sister!*” thought Gammon, watching his companion’s countenance with real interest.]

“I am not quite sure, Mr. Gammon,” continued Aubrey, “that I am observing etiquette in thus coming to you on a matter which you may consider ought to have been left to my attorneys, and who know nothing of my present visit—but——”

“An honourable mind like yours, Mr. Aubrey, may surely act according to its own impulses with safety! As for etiquette, I know of no professional rule which I break, in entering into a discussion with you of any topic connected with the action, which has recently been determined,” said Gammon cautiously, and particularly on his guard, as soon as his penetrating eye had detected the acuteness which was mingled with the sincerity and simplicity of character beaming in the countenance of Mr. Aubrey.

“I dare say you can guess the occasion of my visit, Mr. Gammon?” [“There goes our bill—whew! What now?” thought Gammon.] Mr. Gammon bowed, with an anxious, expectant air. “I allude to the question yet remaining between your client, Mr. Titmouse, and me—the *mesne profits*——” “I feared—I expected as much! It gave me infinite anxiety, as soon as I found you were approaching the subject!

“To me it is really a matter of life and death, Mr. Gammon. It is one pressing me on almost to the very verge of madness!”

“Do not, Mr. Aubrey,” said Gammon, in a tone and with a look which touched the heart of his agitated companion, “magnify the mischief. Don’t—I beg—imagine your position one so hopeless! What is there to stand in the way of an amicable adjustment of these claims? If I had my way, Mr. Aubrey—and if I thought I should not be acting the part of the unjust steward in Scripture—I would write sixty thousand farthings for sixty thousand pounds!”

“You have named the sum for which I believe I am legally liable to Mr. Titmouse,” said Mr. Aubrey with forced composure; “it is a sum as completely out of my power to pay, or secure—or even a quarter of it—as to give him one of the stars.”

“I am aware, Mr. Aubrey, that you must have had many calls upon you, which must have temporarily crippled your resources——” “Temporarily!” echoed Mr. Aubrey with a sickening smile. “I devoutly trust that it is only temporary! For your own and family’s sake,” he added quickly, observing the watchfulness with which his every look and word was regarded by his companion. “Any proposal, Mr. Aubrey,” he continued with the same apparent

kindness of manner, but with serious deliberation, "which you may think proper to make, I am ready—eager—to receive and consider in a liberal spirit. I repeat—If you had *me* only to deal with—you would leave this room with a lightened heart; but to be plain and candid, our client, Mr. Titmouse, is a very difficult person to deal with. I pledge my word of honour to you—[*Oh Gammon! Gammon! Gammon!*]*—*that I have repeatedly urged upon Mr. Titmouse to release you from all the rents received by you previously to your receiving legal notice of the late proceedings." I suppose Gammon felt that this declaration was not received by Mr. Aubrey as implicitly as the former desired and expected; for with a slight stiffness, he added, "I assure you, sir, that it is a fact. I have always been of opinion that the law is harsh, and even faulty in principle, which, in such a case as yours—where the possessor of an estate, to which he believed himself born, is ousted by a title of which he had no previous knowledge, nor *means* of knowledge"—Gammon uttered this very pointedly, and with his eye fixed searchingly upon that of Mr. Aubrey—"requires the ousted party to make good the rents he had so innocently appropriated to his own use. That is my *opinion*, though it may be wrong. I am bound to say, however, that as the law now stands—if Mr. Titmouse should, contrary to my advice, determine to stand upon his strict rights——" Gammon paused, shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, and looked with melancholy significance at Mr. Aubrey.

"I am entirely at his mercy! I understand. I do trust, however, that in the name of our common humanity he will have some consideration for the helpless—the miserable situation in which I am so unexpectedly placed," said Aubrey, with mournful energy. "Never having imagined it necessary to save money——" "Oh no—nor, with such an income as yours was, to resort, I fear, to any of the ordinary modes—insurance, and so forth?" interposed Gammon, with an easy air. "No—no! nothing of the sort"—[*"Ah!—the deuce you have not!"* thought Gammon]*—*"and I confess it was improvident of me. My situation is so deplorable and desperate, that disguise would be absurd, even could I stoop to it; and I declare, in the presence of Heaven, Mr. Gammon, that without parting with the little remnant of plate I have preserved, and my books, I am unable to make up even the amount of your bill sent in the day before yesterday"—Gammon gazed at Mr. Aubrey earnestly, but in silence—"and if my miserable remnant of means *be* so appropriated, we are *literally* beggars," he paused and his voice faltered.

"Indeed, indeed, you distress me beyond measure, Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon in a low tone. "If you can but secure me a merciful interval, to prepare myself for the profession which I have entered, the Bar, whatever earnings I might obtain, after saving a bare maintenance for myself and family, shall be devoted faithfully to liquidate the heavy claim upon me! For myself, Mr. Gammon, I do not care about living upon bread and water for the next ten years; but there are others," his voice trembled. "Sir, by every consideration which a gentleman may be influenced by, I conjure you to interfere between me and utter immediate ruin!" This was the real thrilling language of the heart; but it failed to produce the least impression upon Gammon, exciting intense chagrin and disappointment. "Oh, that it were but in my power," said he, with great energy, "to send you out of this room a free man! If I alone were to be consulted, I would instantly absolve you from all demands, or at least give you your own time, and take no other security than your honour."

"Oh! what a happy, happy man, what a happy family should we be if only——" he could not finish the sentence, for he was greatly moved.

[*"Here's a kettle of fish,"* thought Gammon to himself, and bending down his head, he covered his eyes with his hands; "worse, far worse than I had

suspected. I would take five pounds for all my residuary interest in the sixty thousand pounds! I've not the least doubt that he's speaking the truth. But the *bill* part of the business is highly unsatisfactory! I should like old Quirk to be here just now! Surely Mr. Aubrey must be able to get security? With such friends and connections as his! If one could only get them to join him in security for ten thousand pounds; stay, that won't exactly do either; I must have my thumb upon him."]

"I am so profoundly affected by the situation in which you are placed Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon, at length appearing to have subdued his emotion, and feeling it necessary to say something, "that I think I may take upon myself to say the instructions which we have received shall not be acted upon, come what may. Those must be really monsters, not men, who could press upon one in your position; and that such should be attempted by one who has succeeded to your former advantages, is inconceivably shocking. Mr. Aubrey, *you shall not be crushed*, indeed you shall not, so long as I am a member—perhaps not the least influential one—in this firm, and have any influence with your formidable creditor, Mr. Titmouse. I cannot do justice to my desire to shelter you and yours, Mr. Aubrey, from the storm you dread so justly." There was a warmth, an energy in Gammon's manner, while saying all this, which cheered the drooping heart of poor Mr. Aubrey. "What I am about to say, Mr. Aubrey, is in complete confidence," continued Gammon, in a low tone. Mr. Aubrey bowed, with a little anxious excitement in his manner. "May I rely upon your honour and secrecy?" Most implicitly, sir. What you desire me to keep within my own breast, no one upon earth shall know from *me*." "There are serious difficulties in the way of serving you. Mr. Titmouse is a weak and inexperienced young man, naturally excited to a great pitch by his present elevation, and already embarrassed for want of ready money. You may imagine, sir, that his liabilities to us are of considerable magnitude. You would hardly credit, Mr. Aubrey, the amount of mere money out of pocket for which he stands indebted to us; our outlay during the last two years having considerably crippled our pecuniary resources, in an extensive practice like ours, and driven us to incur liabilities, which are beginning to occasion my partners and myself considerable anxiety. Of course, Mr. Aubrey, we must look to Mr. Titmouse to be speedily reimbursed: he insists upon our immediately calling upon you; and I have reason to suspect that he has at his elbow one or two very heartless advisers, who have suggested this to him; for he follows it most pertinaciously. That he cannot meet the liabilities I have alluded to, out of his annual income, without swallowing it up entirely for eighteen months or two years, is certain. I regret to say that Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap encourage this disposition to press you; do not be alarmed, my dear sir!" he continued, observing the deadly paleness of Mr. Aubrey, whose eye was riveted upon that of Gammon, "for I declare that I will stand between you and them, and it is enough for me to say that I have the power of doing so. I am the only person living who happens to possess the means of influencing Mr. Titmouse; and I am determined to avail myself of them. Now, bearing in mind that I have no legal authority from him, and am, at the same time, only one of a firm, and assuring you that I am entailing a serious responsibility upon myself in what I am doing, let me throw out for your consideration my general notion of what I think ought to be done—merely my off-hand notion." "I perfectly understand; I listen with inexpressible anxiety," said Mr. Aubrey. "Had I been consulted, we should have proposed to you, with reference to our bill (which I candidly acknowledge contains a much more liberal entry than would be allowed on taxation, and which is none of *my* doing"), Gammon knew the credit for candour which this acknowledgment of a fact of which Messrs. Runnington's would quickly apprise him on looking at the bill, was

likely to obtain for him with Mr. Aubrey. "I say, I should have *proposed* to you, in the first instance, the payment of our bill by instalments, during the next three or four years, provided you could have obtained partial security. But I am only one of three, and I know the determination of Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap, not to listen to any proposal with reference to the mesne profits which is not based upon—in short, they say, *the bill must be paid at once without being looked into*—I mean," he added, quickly, "without its being subjected to the harassing and protracted scrutiny which a distrustful, and ungrateful client, has it too frequently in his power to inflict. Oh, let me disguise nothing from you, my dear sir, in a conversation of this kind between two gentlemen," continued Gammon, with an admirable air of frankness, for he perceived that Mr. Aubrey looked slightly staggered. "I am ashamed to acknowledge that that bill does contain exorbitant entries, which have led to very frequent and fierce disputes between me and my partners. But *what is to be done?* Mr. Quirk is the monied man of the firm; and if you were to glance at the articles of our partnership," Gammon shrugged his shoulders and sighed, "you would see the tyrannical extent of power over his partners which, in virtue of that circumstance, he has secured! You observe how candid I am, perhaps foolishly so."

["I've not quite mastered him, I can tell it by his eye," thought Gammon, "is this a game of chess between us? I wonder whether, after all, Messrs. Runnington's are aware of his being here, knowing and trusting to his ability, and have put him thoroughly on his guard? He is checking strong feelings incessantly, and evidently weighing every word I utter. Misery has sharpened faculties naturally acute."]

"Pray do not say so, Mr. Gammon, I fully appreciate your motives. I am devoured with anxiety for an intimation of the nature of the terms which you were about, so kindly, to specify."

"Specify is perhaps rather too strong a term—but to proceed. Supposing, Mr. Aubrey, the preliminary matter which I have alluded to, satisfactorily arranged, I am disposed to say that if you could find security for the payment of the sum of ten thousand pounds within a year or a year and a-half"—[Mr. Aubrey's teeth almost chattered at the mention of it]—"I—I—that is, *my* impression is—but it is only *mine*," added Gammon, earnestly, "that the rest should be left to your own honour, giving at the same time a personal undertaking to pay, at a future, a very distant day, in the manner most convenient to yourself, the sum of ten thousand pounds more, making in all only one-third of the sum due from you; and receiving an absolute release from Mr. Titmouse in respect of the remaining two-thirds—namely, forty thousand pounds."

Mr. Aubrey listened to all this with his feelings and faculties strung to the utmost pitch of intensity; and when Gammon had ceased, experienced a transient sense, as of the fearful mountain that had pressed so long upon his heart, moving.

"Have I made myself intelligible, Mr. Aubrey?" inquired Gammon, with a kind but serious air. "Perfectly—but I feel so oppressed and overwhelmed with the magnitude of the topics we are discussing, that I scarcely at present appreciate the position in which you would place me. I must throw myself, Mr. Gammon, entirely upon your indulgence!"

Gammon looked a little disappointed. "I can imagine your feelings, sir," said he, as he took a sheet of paper and a pencil; and while he made a few memoranda of the arrangement which he had been mentioning, he continued "You see, the great result of what I have been hastily sketching off is, to give you ample time to pay the sums which I have named, and to relieve you, at once, *absolutely* from no less a sum than *forty thousand pounds*," said he, with

emphasis and deliberation, "for which, and with interest, you would otherwise have remained liable to the day of your death; there could be no escape, except, perhaps, into banishment, which with your feelings would be worse than death—for it would be a *dishonourable* exile, to avoid just liabilities; and those who bear your name would, in such an——"

"Pray, sir, be silent!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, in a tone that electrified Gammon, who started from his chair. Mr. Aubrey's face was whitened; his eye glanced lightning at his companion. Dagon-like, Gammon had put forth his hand and touched the ark of Aubrey's honour. Gammon lost his colour, and for perhaps the first time in his life quailed before the majesty of man; 'twas also the majesty of suffering; for he had been torturing a noble nature. Neither of them spoke for some time, Mr. Aubrey continuing highly excited, Gammon gazing at him with unfeigned amazement. The paper which he held in his hand rustled, and he was obliged to lay it down on his lap, lest Mr. Aubrey should notice this evidence of his agitation.

"I am guilty of great weakness, sir," said at length Mr. Aubrey, his excitement only a little abated. He stood erect and spoke with stern precision; "but you, perhaps unconsciously, provoked the display of it. Sir, I am ruined: I am a beggar. We are all ruined; we are all beggars. It is the ordering of God, and I bow to it. But do you presume, sir, to think that at last my honour is in danger? and consider it necessary, as if you were warning one whom you saw about to become a criminal, to expatiate on the nature of the meditated act by which I am to disgrace myself and my family?" Here that family seemed suddenly standing around him; his lip quivered, his eyes filled, and he trembled with excessive emotion.

"This is a sally equally unexpected, Mr. Aubrey, and permit me to add, unwarrantable," said Gammon, calmly, having recovered his self-possession. "You have entirely misunderstood me, or I have ill-explained myself. Your evident excitement and distress touch my very soul, Mr. Aubrey." Gammon's voice trembled. "Suffer me to tell you that I feel an inexpressible respect and admiration for you; and am miserable at the thought of one word of mine having occasioned you an instant's uneasiness." When a generous nature is thus treated, it is apt to feel an excessive contrition for any fault or extravagance which it may have committed—an excessive appreciation of the pain it may have inflicted on another. Thus it was that by the time Gammon had done speaking, Mr. Aubrey felt ashamed and mortified at himself, and conceived an admiration of the dignified forbearance of Gammon, which quickly heightened into respect for his general character as it appeared to Aubrey, and fervent gratitude for the disposition he had evinced, from first to last, so disinterestedly to serve a ruined man. He seemed now to view all that Gammon had proposed in quite a new light—through quite another medium; and his excitable feelings were in some danger of disturbing his judgment.

"As I am a man of business, Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon, shortly afterwards, with a very captivating smile—how frank and forgiving seemed his temper to Aubrey!—"and this is a place for business, shall we resume our conversation? With reference to the first ten thousand pounds, it can be a matter of future arrangement as to the instruments by which its payment is to be secured; and as for the remaining ten thousand, if I were not afraid of rendering myself liable to Mr. Titmouse for neglecting his interest, I should be content with your verbal promise, your mere word of honour, to pay it, as and when you conveniently could. But, in justice to myself, I really must take a *show* of security from you. Say, for instance, two promissory notes, for £5,000 each, payable to Mr. Titmouse. You may really regard them as matters of mere form, for when you have given them to me, they will be deposited *there*" (pointing to an iron safe), "and not again be heard of until you may have

inquired for them. The influence which I happen to have obtained over Mr. Titmouse you may rely upon my exercising with some energy, if ever he should be disposed to press you for payment of either of the instruments I have mentioned. I tell you candidly that they must be *negotiable* in point of form; but I assure you, as sincerely, that I will not permit them to be negotiated. *Now*, may I venture to hope that we understand each other?" added Gammon, with a cheerful air; "and that if this be an arrangement which I shall be able to carry into effect, it is a sufficient evidence of my desire to serve you, and will have the effect of relieving you from an immense load of anxiety and liability?"

"An immense—a crushing load; indeed, sir, if Providence shall in any manner (to me at present undiscoverable) enable me to perform *my* part of the arrangement, and if *you* have but power to carry your views into effect," replied Mr. Aubrey with a sigh of anxiety and a look of gratitude.

"Leave that to *me*, Mr. Aubrey; I will undertake to do it; I will move heaven and earth to do it—and the more eagerly and anxiously, for that I may thereby hope to establish a kind of set-off against the misery and loss which my professional exertions have contributed to occasion you."

"I feel very deeply sensible of your very great—your unexpected kindness, Mr. Gammon; but still, the arrangement suggested, is one which occasions me dreadful anxiety as to my being able to carry out my part of it."

"Never, never despair, Mr. Aubrey! Heaven helps those who help themselves; and I really imagine I see your powerful energies already beginning to surmount your prodigious difficulties! When you have slept over the matter, you will feel the full relief which this arrangement is so calculated to afford your spirits. Of course, too, you will lose no time in communicating to Messrs. Runnington the nature of the arrangement which I have proposed. I can predict that they will be not a little disposed to urge you to complete it. I cannot, however, help once more reminding you, in justice to yourself, Mr. Aubrey, that it is *but* a proposition, in making which I hope it will not prove that I have been carried away by my feelings much further than my duty to my client or his interests——"

Mr. Aubrey was afraid to hear him finish the sentence, lest the faint dawn of hope should disappear from the dark and rough surface of the sea of trouble upon which he was being tossed. "I will consult, as you suggest, sir, my professional advisers; and am strongly inclined to believe that they will feel as you predict. I am bound to consult *them*——"

"Oh, certainly! certainly! I am very strict in the observance of professional etiquette, Mr. Aubrey, I assure you; and should not think of going on with this arrangement, except with them, acting on your behalf. One thing I have to beg, Mr. Aubrey, that either you or they will communicate the result of your deliberation to *me*, personally. I am very desirous that the suggested arrangement should be broken to them by *me*. By the way, if you would favour me with your address, I would make a point of calling at your house either late in the evening or early in the morning."

[As if Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap had not kept eagle eyes upon his every movement since quitting Yatton, with a view to any sudden application for a writ of *Ne Exceas*, which a suspicious movement of his towards the sea-coast might render necessary!]

"I am infinitely obliged to you, sir—but it would be far more convenient for both of us, if you could drop me a line, or favour me with a call at Mr. Weasel's, in Pomegranate Court in the Temple."

Gammon blushed scarlet: but for this accidental mention of the name of Mr. Weasel, who was one of the pleaders occasionally employed by Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap in heavy matters—in all probability Mr. Aubrey

might, within a day or two's time, have had to exercise his faculties, if so disposed, upon a declaration of Trespass for Mesne Profits, in a cause of "*Titmouse v. Aubrey* !"

"As you like—as you like, Mr. Aubrey," replied Gammon, with difficulty concealing his feelings of pique and disappointment at losing the opportunity of a personal introduction to Mr. Aubrey's family. After a few words of general conversation, Gammon inquired how Mr. Aubrey liked his new profession, and assuring him, in an emphatic manner, that he might rely upon being supported, from the moment of his being called to the bar, by almost all the common-law business of the firm of "Quirk, Gammon, and Snap"—they parted. It had been to Mr. Aubrey a memorable interview—and to Gammon a somewhat arduous affair, taxing to an unusual extent his powers of self-command and of dissimulation. As soon as he was left alone, his thoughts instantly recurred to Aubrey's singular burst of hauteur and indignation. Gammon had a stinging sense of submission to superior energy—and felt indignant with himself for not having resented it. Setting aside this source of exquisite irritation to the feeling of a proud man, he felt a depressing consciousness that he had not met with his usual success, in his recent encounter with Mr. Aubrey, who had been throughout cautious, watchful, and courteously distrustful. He had afforded occasional glimpses of the unapproachable pride of his nature—and Gammon had crouched! Was there anything in their interview—thought he, walking thoughtfully to and fro in his room—which, when Aubrey came to reflect upon—for instance—had Gammon disclosed too much the extent of his influence over Titmouse? His cheek slightly flushed; a sigh of fatigue and excitement escaped him; and gathering together his papers, he began to prepare for quitting the office for the day.

Mr. Aubrey quitted Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's office with feelings of mingled exhaustion and despondency. As he walked down Saffron Hill—a dismal, deplorable neighbourhood! what scenes did he witness? Poverty and profligacy revelling on all hands in their wild and filthy excesses! *Here*, was an Irishman, half-stupefied with liquor and bathed in blood, having just been rescued from a dreadful fight in a low underground public-house cellar, by his squalid wife, with disbevelled hair and a filthy infant in her arms—who walked beside him cursing, pinching, and striking him—reproaching him with the knowledge that she and her seven children were lying starving at home; presently he fell into the gutter, and she with her infant fell down over him!

There, was a woman—as it were a bloated mass of filth steeped in gin—standing with a drunken smile, at an old clothes-stall, pawning for a glass of gin a dirty little shirt, which she had a few minutes before stripped from the back of one of her then half-naked children!

A little further on, was a noisy crowd round two men carrying a shutter, on which was strapped the bleeding body (a handkerchief spread over the face) of a poor bricklayer, fallen a few minutes before from the top of some scaffolding in the neighbourhood, and then in the agonies of death—leaving behind him a wife and twelve children, for whom he had long slaved from morning to night, and who were now ignorant of the frightful fate which had befallen him, and that they were left destitute.

There, was a skinny little terrified urchin, about eight years old, with nothing to conceal his dirty, half-starved body, but a tattered man's coat, pinned round him; dying with hunger, he had stolen a villainous-looking bare bone—scarce a halfpenny worth of meat upon it; and a brawny constable, his knuckles fiercely dug into the poor little offender's neck (with his tight grasp), was leading him off to the police station, followed by his shrieking mother; from

the police office he would be committed to Newgate, and thence, after two or three months' imprisonment, and being flogged—miserable little wretch!—by the common hangman (who had hanged the child's father some six months before), he would be discharged—to return several times and undergo a similar process; then to be transported; and finally be hanged, as had been his father before him.

These startling scenes passed before Mr. Aubrey, in the course of a five minutes' walk down Saffron Hill—during which period he now and then paused, and gazed around him with feelings of pity, of astonishment, of disgust, which presently blended and deepened into one feeling of horror. These scenes, to some so fatally familiar—*fatally*, I mean, on account of the *indifference* which their familiarity is apt to induce—to Mr. Aubrey, had on them all the frightful glare of *novelty*. He had never witnessed anything of the sort before; and had no notion of its existence. The people on each side of the Hill, however, seemed perfectly familiar with such scenes, which they seemed to view with the same stupid indifference with which a *lamb led to the slaughter* is beheld by one that has spent his life next door to the slaughter-house.

Like as the lesser light is lost in the greater, so, in Aubrey's case, was the lesser misery he suffered, merged in his sense of the greater misery he witnessed. What, after all, was his position, in comparison with that of those now before and around him? What cause of thankfulness had he not, for the merciful mildness of the dispensation of Providence towards him and his? Such were his thoughts and feelings, as he stood gazing at the scenes which had called them forth, when his eye lit on the figure of Mr. Gammon approaching him. He was threading his way, apparently lost in thought, through the scenes which had so powerfully affected Mr. Aubrey, who stood eyeing him with a sort of unconscious intensity, as if secure from his observation, till he was actually addressed by him.

"Mr. Aubrey!" exclaimed Gammon, courteously saluting him. Each took off his hat to the other. Though Aubrey hardly intended it, he found himself engaged in conversation with Gammon, who, in a remarkably feeling tone, and with a happy flattering deference of manner, intimated that he could guess the subject of Mr. Aubrey's thoughts, namely, the absorbing matters which they had been discussing together.

"No, it is not so," said Mr. Aubrey with a sigh, as he walked on—Gammon keeping easily beside him—"I have been profoundly affected by scenes which I have witnessed in the immediate neighbourhood of your office, since quitting it; what misery! what horror!"

"Ah, Mr. Aubrey!"—exclaimed Gammon with a sigh, as they very slowly ascended Holborn Hill, separate, but side by side—"what a checkered scene is life! Guilt and innocence—happiness and misery—wealth and poverty—disease and health—wisdom and folly—sensuality and refinement—piety and irreligion—how strangely intermingled we behold them, wherever we look on life—how difficult to the philosopher to detect the principle—" "Difficult?—Impossible! Impossible!"—exclaimed Mr. Aubrey thoughtfully. "Comparison, I have often thought," said Gammon, after a pause—"comparison of one's own misfortunes with the greater misfortunes endured by others, is beneficial or prejudicial—consolatory or disheartening—according as the mind of him who makes the comparison is well or ill regulated—possessed or destitute of moral and religious principle!"

"It is so, indeed," said Mr. Aubrey; though not particularly inclined to enter into conversation, he was pleased with the tone of his companion's remark.

"As for me"—proceeded Gammon with a slight sigh—"the absorbing

anxieties of professional life ; and, too, a branch of professional life which, infinitely to my distaste, brings me constantly into scenes such as you have been observing, have contributed to render me less sensible of their real character ; yet can I vividly conceive the effect they must, when first seen, produce upon the mind and heart of a compassionate, an observant, a reflecting man, Mr. Aubrey !”

Gammon looked a gentleman ; his address was easy and insinuating, full of delicate deference, without the slightest tendency to cant or sycophancy ; his countenance was an intellectual and expressive one ; his conversation that of an educated and thinking man. He was striving his utmost to produce a favourable impression on Mr. Aubrey ; and, as is very little to be surprised at, he succeeded. By the time that they had got about twenty yards beyond Fetter Lane, they might have been seen walking together arm-in-arm. As they approached Oxford Street, they suddenly stumbled on Mr. Runnington.

“God bless me, Mr. Aubrey !” said he surprisedly — “and Mr. Gammon ? How do you do, Mr. Gammon ?” — he continued, taking off his hat with a little formality, and speaking in a corresponding tone ; but he was encountered by Gammon with greatly superior ease and distance, and was not a little nettled at it ; for he was so palpably foiled with his own weapons.

“Well—I shall now resign you to your legitimate adviser, Mr. Aubrey,” said Gammon with a smile ; then, addressing Mr. Runnington, in whose countenance pique and pride were abundantly visible,—Mr. Aubrey has favoured me with a call to-day, and we have had some little discussion on a matter which he will explain to you. As for me, Mr. Aubrey, I ought to have turned off two streets ago—so I wish you good evening.”

Mr. Aubrey and he shook hands as they exchanged adieus. Mr. Runnington and he simply raised each his hat, and bowed to the other with cold politeness. As Mr. Runnington and Mr. Aubrey walked westward together, the former, who was a very cautious man, did not think fit to express the uneasiness he felt at Mr. Aubrey’s having entered into anything like confidential intercourse with one whom he believed to be so subtle and dangerous a person as Mr. Gammon. He was, however, very greatly surprised when he came to hear of the proposal which had been made up by Mr. Gammon, concerning the mesne profits, which, he said, was so unaccountably reasonable and liberal, considering the parties by whom it was made, that he feared Mr. Aubrey must be lying under some mistake. He would, however, turn it anxiously over in his mind, and consult with his partners ; and, in short, do whatever they conceived best for Mr. Aubrey—that he might depend upon. “And, in the mean time, my dear sir,” added Mr. Runnington, with a smile designed to disguise considerable anxiety, “it may be as well for you not to have any further personal communication with these parties, whom you do not know as well as we do ; but let us negotiate with them in everything !” Thus they parted ; and Mr. Aubrey entered Vivian Street with a considerably lighter heart than he had ever before carried into it.

But I must return to Yatton, where some matters had transpired which are worth noticing. Though Mr. Yahoo paid rather anxious court to Mr. Gammon, who was very far too much for him in every way, ’twas plain that he dreaded and disliked, as much as he was despised by that gentleman. Mr. Gammon easily extracted from Titmouse that Yahoo was endeavouring, from time to time, artfully to set him against his protector, Mr. Gammon. This was something ; but more than this—Yahoo, a bold, dashing scoundrel, was obtaining a growing ascendancy over Titmouse, whom he was rapidly initiating into all manner of vile habits and practices ; and, in short, completely corrupting. But, above all, Gammon ascertained that Yahoo had already commenced, with great success, his experiments upon the purse of Titmouse. Before they had

been a week at Yatton, down came a splendid billiard table with its appendages from London, accompanied by a man to fix it—as he did—in the library, which he quickly denuded of all traces of its former character; and here Yahoo, Titmouse, and Fitz-Snooks would pass a good deal of their time. Then they would have tables and chairs, and cards, cigars, and brandy and water, out upon the beautiful “soft, smooth-shaven lawn,” and sit there playing *ecarté*, at once pleasantly soothed and stimulated by their cigars and brandy and water, for half a day together. Then Yahoo got up frequent excursions to Grilston, and even to York; where, together with his two companions, he had “great sport,” as the newspapers began to intimate with growing frequency and distinctness. Actuated by that execrable licentiousness with reference to the female sex, by which he was peculiarly distinguished, and of which he boasted, he had got into several curious adventures with farmers’ girls, and others in the vicinity of Yatton, and even amongst the female members of the establishment at the Hall; in which latter quarter Fitz-Snooks and Titmouse began to imitate his example. Mr. Gammon conceived a fearful, a shuddering loathing and disgust for the miscreant leader into these enormities; and, but for certain consequences, would have despatched him with as much indifference as he would have laid arsenic in the way of a bold voracious rat, or killed a snake. As it was, he secretly caused him to experience, on one or two occasions, the effects of his goodwill towards him. Yahoo had offered certain atrocious indignities to the sweetheart of a strapping young farmer; whose furious complaints coming to Mr. Gammon’s ears, that gentleman, under a pledge of secrecy, gave him two guineas to be on the look-out for Yahoo, and give him the best taste he knew how to give, of a pair of Yorkshire fists. A day or two afterwards, the Satyr fell in with his unsuspected enemy. Yahoo was a strongly-built man, and an excellent bruiser; but was at first disposed to shirk the fight, on glancing at the prodigious proportions of Hazel, and the fury flaming in his eyes. The instant, however, that he saw the attitude into which poor Hazel threw himself, Yahoo smiled, stripped, and set to. I am sorry to say that it was a good while before Hazel could get one single blow at his accomplished opponent; whom, however, he at length began to wear out. Then he gave him a miserable pommelling, to be sure; and finished by knocking out five of his front teeth, viz., three in the upper, and two in the under jaw—beautifully white and regular teeth they certainly were; and the loss of them caused him great affliction on the score of his appearance, and also not a little interfered with the process of cigar-smoking, and would, besides, have debarred him from enlisting as a soldier, inasmuch as he could not bite off the end of his cartridge: wherefore, it would seem, that Hazel had committed the offence of *Mayhem*. Mr. Gammon condoled heartily with Mr. Yahoo, on hearing of the brutal attack which had been made upon him, and as the assault had not been committed in the presence of a third party, strongly recommended him to bring an action of trespass *vi et armis* against Hazel, which Gammon undertook to conduct for him to—a nonsuit. While they were conversing in this friendly way together, it suddenly occurred to Gammon that there was another service he could render Mr. Yahoo, and with equally strict observance of the injunction, *not to let his left hand know what his right hand did*; for he loved the character of a secret benefactor. So he wrote up a letter to Snap (whom he knew to have been treated very insolently by Yahoo), desiring him to go to two or three flash bill-brokers and money-lenders, and ascertain whether they had any paper by them with the name of “Yahoo” on it:—and in the event of such being discovered, he was to act in the manner pointed out by Gammon. Off went Snap like a shot, on receiving this letter; and the very first gentleman he applied to, viz., a Mr. Suck’em Dry, proved to be possessed of an acceptance of Yahoo’s for £200, for which Dry had given only £5 on specula-

tion. He readily yielded to Snap's representation, that he would give him—Dry—a shy at Mr. Yahoo gratis—and put the document into the hands of Snap; who forthwith delivered it, confidentially, to Swindle Shark, gent., one etc., a little Jew attorney in Chancery Lane, into whose office the dirty work of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap was swept—in cases where they did not choose to appear. I wish the mutilated Yahoo could have seen the mouthful of glittering teeth that were displayed by the hungry Jew, on receiving the above commission. His duties, though of a painful, were of a brief and simple description. 'Twas a plain case of *Indorsee v. Acceptor*. The affidavit of debt was sworn the same afternoon; and within an hour's time afterwards, a thin slip of paper was delivered into the hands of the Under-sheriff of Yorkshire, commanding him to take the body of Pimp Yahoo, if he should be found in his bailiwick, and him safely keep—out of harm's way—to enable him to pay £200 debt to Suck'em Dry, and £24 6s. 10d. costs to Swindle Shark. Down went that little "infernal machine" to Yorkshire by that night's post.

Nothing could exceed the astonishment and concern with which Mr. Gammon, the evening but one afterwards, on returning to the Hall from a ride to Grilston, heard Titmouse and Fitz-Snooks—deserted beings!—tell him how, an hour before, two big vulgar fellows, one of them with a long slip of paper in his hands, had called at the Hall, asked for the innocent unsuspecting Yahoo, just as he had made an admirable *coup*—and insisted on his accompanying them to the house of one of the aforesaid bailiffs, and then on to York Castle. They had brought a tax cart with them for his convenience; and into it, between his two new friends, was forced to get the astonished Yahoo—smoking, as well as he could, a cigar, with some score or two of which he had filled all his pockets, and swearing oaths enough to last the whole neighbourhood for a fortnight at least. Mr. Gammon was quite shocked at the indignity which had been perpetrated, and asked why the villains had not been kept till he could have been sent for. Then, leaving the melancholy Titmouse and Fitz-Snooks to themselves for a little while, he took a solitary walk in the elm avenue, where—grief has different modes of expressing itself—he relieved his excited feelings by reiterated little bursts of gentle laughter. As soon as the *York True Blue* had, amongst other intimations of fashionable movements, informed the public that "*The Hon. Pimp Yahoo*" had quitted Yatton Hall for York Castle, where he intended to remain and receive a large party of friends—it was astonishing how soon they began to muster and rally round him. "*Detainers*"—so that species of visiting cards is called—came fluttering in like snow; and, in short, there was no end of the messages of civility and congratulation which he received from those whom he had obliged with his valuable countenance and custom.

Ah me, poor Yahoo, completely done! Oft is it, in this infernal world of ours, that the best concerted schemes are thus suddenly defeated by the envious and capricious fates! Thus were thy arms suddenly held back from behind, just as they were encircling as pretty, plump a pigeon as ever nestled in them with pert and playful confidence, to be plucked!

Poor Titmouse was very dull for some little time after this sudden abduction of the bold and brilliant spirit, for whom I have above poured out the deep sorrows of my soul, and wished to bring an action, at the suggestion of Fitz-Snooks, against the miscreant who had dared to set the law in motion at Yatton, under the very nose of its lord and master. As soon, however, as Gammon intimated to him that all those who had lent Yahoo money, might now rely upon that gentleman's honour, and whistle back their money at their leisure, Titmouse burst out into a great rage, telling Gammon that he, Titmouse, had only a day or two before lent Yahoo £150, of good and 'awful money of Great Britain; and that he was a "cursed scamp," who had known

when he borrowed, that he could not repay; and a Detainer, at the suit of "Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq.," was one of the very earliest that found its way into the Sheriff's office; this new creditor becoming one of the very bitterest and most relentless against the fallen Yahoo, except, perhaps, Mr. Fitz-Snooks. That gentleman having lent the amiable Yahoo no less than thirteen hundred pounds, remained easy all the while, under the impression that certain precious documents called "I.O.U.'s" of the said Yahoo were as good as cash; and was horribly dismayed on discovering that it was otherwise; that he was not to be paid before all other creditors, and immediately; so he also sent a very special message in the shape of a Detainer, backed by a great number of curses.

In process of time Mr. Yahoo bethought himself of getting "*whitewashed*;" but when he came to be inspected, it was considered that he was not properly *seasoned*; so the operation was delayed for two years, under a very arbitrary statute, which enacted, "that if it should appear that the said prisoner had contracted any of his debts *fraudulently*, or by means of *false pretences*, or *without having had any reasonable or probable expectation, at the time when contracted, of paying the same*," etc., etc., etc., "or should be indebted for damages recovered in any action for *criminal conversation*, or *seduction*, or for *malicious injuries*, etc., etc., such prisoner should be discharged as to such debts and damages, as soon only as he should have been in custody at the suit of such creditors for a period or periods not exceeding two years."

Yahoo having been thus adroitly disposed of, Mr. Gammon had the satisfaction of finding that mischievous simpleton, Fitz-Snooks, very soon afterwards take his departure. He pined for the pleasures of the town (which he had money enough to enjoy for about three years longer, with economy; after which he might go abroad, or to the *dogs*—wherever they were to be found). 'Twas indeed monstrous dull at Yatton; the game, which Yahoo had given him a taste for, was so very *strictly preserved* there! and the birds so uncommon *shy* and wild, and strong on the wing! Besides, Gammon's presence was a terrible pressure upon him, overawing and benumbing him, in spite of several attempts which he had made, when charged with the requisite quantity of wine, to exhibit an impertinent familiarity, or even defiance. As soon as poor Titmouse had bade him good-by, shaken hands with him, and lost sight of him—he was at Yatton, *alone with Gammon*, and felt as if a spell were upon him—he was completely cowed and prostrate. Yet Gammon laid himself out to the very utmost to please him, and re-assure his drooping spirits. Titmouse had got it into his head that the mysterious and dreadful Gammon had, in some deep way or other, been at the bottom of Yahoo's abduction and the disappearance of Fitz-Snooks, and would, by-and-by, do the same for him. He had no feeling of *ownership* of Yatton; but of being, as it were, only tenant-at-will thereof to Mr. Gammon. Whenever he tried to re-assure himself, by repeating to himself that it did not signify—for Yatton was his own—and he might do as he liked, his feelings might be compared to a balloon, which, with the eye of eager and anxious thousands upon it, yet cannot get inflated sufficiently to rise one inch from the ground. How was it? Mr. Gammon's manner towards him was most uncommonly respectful; what else could he wish for? Yet he would have given a thousand pounds to Mr. Gammon to take himself off, and never show his nose again at Yatton! It annoyed him, too, more than he could express, to perceive the deference and respect which every one at the Hall manifested towards Mr. Gammon. Titmouse would sometimes stamp his foot when alone, with childish fury on the ground, when he thought of it. When at dinner, and sitting together afterwards, Gammon would rack his invention for jokes and anecdotes to amuse Titmouse—who would certainly give a kind of laugh, exclaim, "Bravo! Ha, ha! 'Pon my life!—capital!—By Jove! Most uncommon good! you don't say so?" and go on.

drinking glass after glass of wine, or brandy and water, and smoking cigar after cigar, till he felt duddled and sick, in which condition he would retire to bed, and leave Gammon, clear and serene in head and temper, to his meditations. When, at length, Gammon broached the subject of their bill—a frightful amount it was; of the monies advanced by Mr. Quirk, for his support for eight or nine months, on a liberal scale; and which mounted up to a sum infinitely larger than could have been supposed; and lastly, of the bond for ten thousand pounds, as the just reward to the firm for their long-continued, most anxious, and successful exertions on Titmouse's behalf—Titmouse mustered up all his resolution, as for a last desperate struggle; swore they were robbing him; and added, with a furious snap of the fingers, "they had better take the estate themselves—allow him a pound a-week, and send him back to Tag-rag's." Then he burst into tears, and cried like a child, long and bitterly.

"Well, sir," said Gammon, after remaining silent for some time, looking at Titmouse calmly, but with an expression of face which frightened him out of his wits, "if this is to be really the way in which I am to be treated by you—I, the only *real* *disinterested* friend you have in the world (as you have had hundreds of opportunities of ascertaining), if my advice is to be spurned, and my motives suspected; if your first and deliberate engagements to our firm are to be wantonly broken——" "Ah, but, 'pon my soul, I was humbugged into making them," said Titmouse, passionately. "Why, you little miscreant!" exclaimed Gammon, starting up in his chair, and gazing at him as if he would have scorched him with his eye, "Do you dare to say so? If you have no gratitude—have you lost your *memory*? What were you when I dug you out of your filthy hole at Closet Court? Did you not repeatedly go down on your knees to us? Did you not promise a thousand times to do infinitely more than you are now called upon to do? And is this, you insolent, despicable little insect?—is *this* the return you make us for putting you, a beggar—and very nearly too, an idiot——" "You're most uncommon polite," said Titmouse, suddenly and bitterly.

"Silence, sir! I am in no humour for trifling!" interrupted Gammon sternly. "I say, is *this* the return you think of making us; not only to insult us, but refuse to pay money actually advanced by us to save you from starvation—money, and days and nights, and weeks and months, and *many* months of intense anxiety, expended in discovering how to put you in possession of a splendid fortune?—Poh! you miserable little trifer!—why should I trouble myself thus? Remember—remember, Tittlebat Titmouse," continued Gammon, in a low tone, and extending towards him threateningly his thin forefinger, "I who made you, will in one day—one single day—unmake you—will blow you away like a bit of froth; you shall never be seen, or heard of, or thought of, except by some small draper whose unhappy shopman you may be!"

"Ah!—'pon my life! Dare say you think I'm uncommon frightened! Ah, ha! Monstrous—particular good!" said Titmouse.

Gammon perceived that he trembled in every limb; and the smile which he tried to throw into his face was so wretched, that, had you seen him at that moment, and considered his position, much and justly as you now despise him, you must have pitied him. "You're always now going on in this way!—It's so very likely!" continued he. "Why, 'pon my soul, am not I to be a lord one of these days? Can you help that? Can you send a lord behind a draper's counter? 'Pon my soul, what do you say to that? I like that, uncommon——"

"What do I say?" replied Gammon calmly, "why, that I've a great mind to say and do something that would make you—make you—fit to jump head foremost into a sewer." Titmouse's heart was lying fluttering at his throat.

"Tittlebat, Tittlebat!" continued Gammon, dropping his voice, and speaking in a very kind and earnest manner, "if you did but know the extent to which an accident has placed you in my power! at this moment in my power! Really I almost tremble, myself, to think of it!" He rose, brought his chamber-candlestick out of the hall—lit it—bade Titmouse good-night, sadly but sternly—and shook him by the hand—"I may rid you of my presence to-morrow morning, Mr. Titmouse. I shall leave you to *try to enjoy Yatton!* May you find a *truer*—a more powerful friend than you will have lost in me!" Titmouse never shrunk more helplessly under the eye of Mr. Gammon than he did at that moment.

"You—you—*won't* stop and smoke another cigar with a poor devil, will you, Mr. Gammon?" he inquired faintly. "It's somehow—most uncommon lonely in this queer, large, old-fashioned——" "Not to-night, thank you," replied Gammon—and withdrew, leaving Titmouse in a state of mingled alarm and anger—the former, however, predominating.

"By jingo!" he at length exclaimed, with a heavy sigh, after a reverie of about three minutes, gulping down the remainder of his brandy, and water, "If that same gent, Mr. Gammon, a'n't the—the—devil—he's the very best imitation of him that ever I heard tell of!" Here he glanced furtively round the room; then he got a little flustered; rang his bell quickly for his valet, and followed by him, retired to his dressing-room.

The next morning the storm had entirely blown over. When they met at breakfast, Titmouse, as Gammon knew would be the case, was all submission and respect; in fact, he was evidently thoroughly frightened by what Gammon had said, and infinitely more by the *manner* in which he had said what he did say overnight. Gammon, however, preserved for some little time the haughty air with which he had met him: but a few words of poor Titmouse, expressing his regret for what he had said when he had drunk too much—poor little soul!—overnight, and unqualifyingly submitting to every one of the requisitions which had been insisted on by Mr. Gammon—quickly dispersed the cloud that was settled on Gammon's brow.

"Now, my dear sir," said he very graciously, "you show yourself the gentleman I always took you for—and I forget, for ever, all that passed between us so unpleasantly last night. I am sure it will never be so again: for now we *entirely* understand each other?" "Oh, yes—'pon my life—quite entirely:" replied Titmouse, meekly.

Soon after breakfast they adjourned, at Gammon's request, to the billiard-room; where, though that gentleman knew how to handle a cue, and Titmouse did not, he expressed great admiration for Titmouse's play, and felt great interest in being shown by him how to get a ball, now and then, into each pocket at one stroke, a masterly manœuvre which Titmouse succeeded in two or three times, and Gammon not once, during their hour's play. 'Twas upon that occasion that they had the friendly conversation in which Titmouse made the suggestion we have already heard of, viz., that Gammon should immediately clap the screw upon Aubrey, with a view of squeezing out of him at least sufficient to pay the £10,000 bond, and their bill of costs, immediately; and Titmouse urged Gammon at once to send Aubrey packing after Yahoo to York Castle, as an inducement to an early settlement of the remainder. Gammon, however, assured Mr. Titmouse that in all probability Mr. Aubrey had not a couple of thousand pounds in the world. "Well—that will do to begin with," said Titmouse, "and the rest *must* come, sooner or later." "Leave him to me, my dear Titmouse, or rather to Mr. Quirk—who'll *wring* him before he's done with him, I'll warrant him! But, in the mean while, I'll work day and night, but I'll relieve you from this claim of Mr. Quirk, for, in fact, I have little or no real interest in the matter."

"You'll take a slapping slice out of the bond, eh? Aha, Mr. Gammon!—But what were you saying you'd do for me?"

"I repeat, that I am your only disinterested friend, Mr. Titmouse; I shall never see a hundred pounds of what is going into Mr. Quirk's hands, who, I must say, however, has richly earned what he's going to get, by following my directions throughout. But I was saying that I had hit upon a scheme for ridding you of your difficulties. Though you have only just stepped into your property, and consequently people are very shy of advancing money on mortgage, if you'll only keep quiet, and leave the affair entirely to me, I will undertake to get you a sum of possibly twenty thousand pounds."

"My eyes!" exclaimed Titmouse, excitedly; quickly, however, adding, with a sad air—"but then, what a lot of it will go to old Quirk?" "He *is* rather a keen and hard—ahem! I own; but——" "'Pon my life—couldn't we *do* the old gent?" "On no consideration, Mr. Titmouse; it would be a fatal step for you—and indeed for me." "What! and can he do anything, too? I thought it was only you."—The little fool had brought a glimpse of colour into Gammon's cheek—but Titmouse's volatility quickly relieved his Prospero. "By the way—'pon my life—sha'n't I have to pay it all back again? There's a go! I hadn't thought of that."

"I shall first try to get it out of Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon, "and then out of another friend of yours. In the meanwhile we must not drop the Tag-rags just yet." They then got into a long and confidential conversation together; in the course of which, Titmouse happened to pop out a little secret of his, which till then he had managed to keep from Gammon, and which occasioned that gentleman a great and sudden inward confusion—one which it was odd that so keen an observer as Titmouse did not perceive indications of in the countenance of Gammon; viz., his—Titmouse's fervent and disinterested love for Miss Aubrey. While he was rattling on with eager volubility upon this topic, Gammon, after casting about a little in his mind, as to how he should deal with this interesting discovery, resolved, for the present to humour the notion, and got out of Titmouse a full and particular account of his original "*smite*"—the indelible impression she had made on his heart—the letter which he had addressed to her—[here Gammon's vivid fancy portrayed to him the sort of composition which must have reached Miss Aubrey, and he nearly burst into a gentle fit of laughter]—and, with a strange candour, or rather, to do him justice, with that frank simplicity which is characteristic of noble natures—he at length described his unlucky encounter with Miss Aubrey and her maid, in the winter; whereat Gammon felt a sort of sudden inward spasm, which by a sort of sympathy excited a twinging sensation in his right toe—but it passed away—'twas, after all, only a little juvenile indiscretion of Titmouse's; but Gammon, with rather a serious air, assured Titmouse that he had probably greatly endangered his prospects with Miss Aubrey.

"Eh? Why, d—l take it! a'n't I going to offer to her though she's got nothing?" interrupted Titmouse, with astonishment. "True!—Ah, I had lost sight of that. Well—if you will pledge yourself to address no more letters to her, nor take any steps to see her, without first communicating with me—I think I can promise—hem!" he looked archly at Titmouse. "She's a most uncommon lovely gal"—he simpered, sheepishly. The fact was that Gammon had conceived quite another scheme for Titmouse—wholly inconsistent with his pure, ardent, and enlightened attachment to Miss Aubrey; 'twas undoubtedly rather a bold and ambitious one, but Gammon did not despair; for he had that confidence in himself, and in his knowledge of human nature, which always supported him in the most arduous and apparently hopeless undertakings.

There was a visible alteration for the better in the state of things at Yatton,

as soon as Messrs. Yahoo and Fitz-Snooks had been disposed of. Now and then a few of the distinguished people who had honoured Mr. Titmouse by going out in procession to meet and welcome him, were invited to spend a day at Yatton; and generally quitted full of admiration of the dinner and wines they got, the unaffected good-nature and simplicity of their hospitable host, and the bland, composed, and intellectual deportment and conversation of Mr. Gammon. When rent-day arrived, Mr. Titmouse, attended by Mr. Gammon, made his appearance, from time to time, in the steward's room, and also in the hall, where, according to former custom, good substantial fare was set out for the tenants. They received him with a due respect of manner; but where was the cheerfulness, the rough, honest heartiness of days gone by? Few of them stayed to partake of the good things prepared for them, which greatly affected Mr. Griffiths, and piqued Mr. Gammon; as for Titmouse, however, he said, with a laugh, "Curse 'em! let 'em leave it alone if a'n't hungry!" and any feeling of mortification he might have experienced, was dissipated by the amount of the sum paid into his banker's. Gammon was sensible that the scenes which had been exhibited at Yatton on the first night of his protégé's arrival, had seriously injured him in the neighbourhood and county, and was bent upon effacing, as quickly as possible, such unfavourable impressions, by prevailing on Titmouse to "purge and live cleanly"—at all events for the present.

Let me pause now, for a moment, to inquire, ought not this favoured young man to have felt happy? Here he was, master of a fine estate, producing him a very splendid rent-roll; a delightful residence, suggesting innumerable associations connected with old English feeling; a luxurious table, with the choicest liqueurs and wines, in abundance; might smoke the finest cigars that the world could produce, from morning to night, if so disposed; had unlimited facilities for securing a distinguished personal appearance, as far as dress and decorations went; had all the amusements of the county at his command; troops of servants, eager and obeisant in their attentions; horses and carriages of every description which he might have chosen to order out—had, in short, all the "appliances and means to boot," which could be desired or imagined by a gentleman of his station and affluence. Mr. Gammon was, though somewhat stern and plain-spoken, still a most sincere and powerful friend, deeply and disinterestedly solicitous about his interests, and protecting him from villainous and designing adventurers; then he had in prospect the brilliant mazes of fashionable life in town—oh, in the name of everything that this world can produce, and of the feelings it should excite, ought not Titmouse to have enjoyed life—to have been happy? Yet he was not; he felt, quite independently of any constraint occasioned by the presence of Mr. Gammon, full of deplorable ennui, and wearisomeness inexpressible, and which nothing could alleviate but the constant use of cigars and brandy and water. On the first Sunday after the departure of Fitz-Snooks, he was prevailed upon to accompany the devout and exemplary Gammon to church; where, barring a good many ill-concealed yawns and constant fidgetiness, he conducted himself with tolerable decorum. Yet still the style of his dress, his air, and his countenance, filled the little congregation with feelings of great astonishment, when they thought that *that* was the new Squire of Yatton, and for a melancholy moment contrasted him with his predecessor, Mr. Aubrey. As for the worthy vicar, Dr. Tatham, Gammon resolved to secure his good graces, and succeeded. He called upon him soon after having heard from Titmouse of his, Yahoo, and Fitz-Snooks' encounter with Dr. Tatham, and expressed profound concern on hearing of the rude treatment he had encountered. There was a gentleness and affability—tempering at once and enhancing his evident acuteness and knowledge of the world—which quite captivated the little Doctor. But, above all, the expressions of delicate sympathy and regret with which he now and then alluded to the late

occupants of Yatton, and towards whom the stern requisitions of professional duty had caused him to play so odious a part, and inquired about them, drew out almost all that was in the little Doctor's heart concerning his departed friends. Gammon gazed with deep interest at the old blind stag-hound, and feeble old Peggy, and seemed never tired of hearing the Doctor's little anecdotes concerning them. He introduced Titmouse to the vicar; and, in his presence, Gammon declared his (Titmouse's) contempt for the two fellows who were with him when first he saw Dr. Tatham; who thereupon banished from his heart all recollection of the conduct which had so deeply hurt his feelings. Gammon infinitely delighted the Doctor, by calling on a Monday morning, and alluding with evident interest and anxiety to certain passages in the Doctor's sermon of the day before, and which led to a very lengthened and interesting discussion. In consequence of what then transpired, the Doctor suddenly bethought himself of routing out an old sermon, which he had once preached before the judges of assize—and, during the week, he touched it up with a great deal of care for the ensuing Sunday—when he had the satisfaction of observing the marked and undeviating attention with which Mr. Gammon sat listening to him; and that candid inquirer after truth afterwards stepped into the little vestry, and warmly complimented the Doctor upon his discourse. Thus it was that Doctor Tatham came to pen a postscript to one of his letters to Mrs. Aubrey, which I have formerly alluded to, and of which the following is a copy:—

"P.S.—By the way, the altered state of things at the Hall, I am of opinion is entirely owing to the presence and the influence of a Mr. Gammon—one of the chief of Mr. Titmouse's solicitors, and to whom he seems very firmly attached. I have lived too long in the world to form hasty opinions, and am not apt to be deceived in my estimate of character; but I must say, I consider Mr. Gammon to be a very superior man, both in character, intellect, and acquirements. He possesses great acuteness and knowledge of the world, general information, a very calm and courteous address—and above and beyond all, is a man of very enlightened religious feeling. He comes constantly to church, and presents a truly edifying example to all around, of decorum and attention. You would be delighted to hear the discussions we have had on points which my sermons have suggested to him. I preached one lately, specially aimed at him, which, thank God! I have every reason to believe has been attended with happy effects, and allayed some startling doubts which had been for years tormenting him. I am sure that my dear friend" (*i.e.*, Mr. Aubrey) "would be delighted with him. I had myself, I assure you, to overcome a very strong prejudice against him—a thing I always love to attempt, and have in a measure, in the present instance, succeeded. He speaks of you all with evident caution, but, at the same time, respect and sympathy."

This postscript it was, which, as I have already intimated, suggested to Mr. Aubrey to seek the interview with Gammon which has been described, and during which it was frequently present to his mind.

While, however, under the pressure of Mr. Gammon's presence and authority, Titmouse was for a brief while leading this sober retired life at Yatton—why, he hardly knew, except that Gammon willed it—a circumstance occurred which suddenly placed him on the very highest pinnacle of popularity in metropolitan society. I hardly know how to suppress my feelings of exultation, in retracing the rapid steps by which Mr. Titmouse was transformed into a lion of the first magnitude. Be it known that there was a Mr. Bladdery Pip, a fashionable novelist, possessed of most extraordinary versatility and power; for he had, at the end of every nine months, during the last nine years, produced a novel in three volumes—each succeeding one eclipsing the splendour of its predecessor (in the judgment of the most able and disinterested newspaper critics)

—in the “masterly structure of the plot”—the “vivid and varied delineation of character”—the “profound acquaintance with the workings of the human heart”—“exquisite appreciation of life in all its endless varieties”—“piercing but delicate satire”—“bold and powerful denunciations of popular vices”—“rich and tender domestic scenes”—“inimitable ease and grace”—“consummate tact and judgment”—“reflection co-extensive with observation”—“the style flowing, brilliant, nervous, varied, picturesque,” *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*. We have, in the present day, thank Heaven! at least a hundred such writers; but at the time about which I am writing, Mr. Bladdery Pip was pretty nearly alone in his glory. Such was the man, to whom it suddenly occurred, on glancing over the newspaper report of the trial of *Doe on the Demise of Titmouse v. Jolter*, to make the interesting facts of the case the basis of a new novel, on quite a new plan, and which was infinitely to transcend all his former works, and, in fact, occasion quite a revolution in that brilliant and instructive species of literature. To work went Mr. Pip, within a day or two after the trial was over, and in an incredibly short space of time had got to the close of his labours. Practice had made him perfect, and given him infinite facility in the production of first-rate writing. The spirited publisher (Mr. Bubble) then quickly set to work to “get the steam up” fully! ah! how secretly and skilfully! For some time there appeared numerous intimations in the daily papers, that “the circles of ton” were “on the *qui vive*” with expectation of a certain, etc., etc., etc.—that “disclosures of a very extraordinary character” were being looked for—“attempts made to suppress,” etc., etc.—“compromising certain distinguished,” etc., and so forth; all these paragraphs being in the unquestionable *editorial* style, and *genuine* indications of a mysterious under-current of curiosity and excitement, existing in those regions which were watched with reverential awe and constancy by those in the lower regions. As time advanced, more frequent and distinct became these titillations of the public palate—these intimations of what was going forward, and what might shortly be expected, from the appearance of the long-promised work. Take for instance the following, which ran the round of every newspaper, and wrought up to a high pitch the curiosity of half the fools in the country:—

“The efforts made to deprive the public of the interesting and peculiar scenes contained in the forthcoming novel, and to suppress it, have entirely failed, owing to the resolution of the gifted author, and the determination of the spirited publisher; and their only effect has been to stimulate and expedite their efforts. It will bear the exciting and *piquant* title—‘Tippetiwink;’ and is said to be founded on the remarkable circumstances attending the recent trial of a great ejectment cause at York. More than one noble family’s history is believed to be involved in some of the details which will be found in the forthcoming publication, for which, we are assured, there are already symptoms of an unprecedented demand. The ‘favoured few’ who have seen it, predict that it will produce a prodigious sensation. The *happy audacity* with which facts are adhered to, will, we trust, not lead to the disagreeable consequences that are looked for in certain quarters with some anxiety. When we announce that its author is the gifted writer of ‘The Silver Spoons’—‘Spinnach’—‘The Pirouette’—‘Tittle-Tattle’—‘Fitz-Giblets’—‘Squint,’ etc., etc., etc., we trust we are violating no literary confidence.”

There was no resisting this sort of thing. In that day, a skilfully directed play of puffs laid prostrate the whole reading and fashionable world, producing the excitement of which they affected to chronicle the existence. The artilleryman, in the present instance, was a hack writer, hired by Mr. Bubble—in fact kept by him entirely—to perform services of this degrading description—and he sat from morning to night in a back-room on Mr. Bubble’s premises,

engaged in spinning out these villainous and lying paragraphs concerning every work published, or about to be published, by Mr. Bubble. Then he hit upon another admirable device. He had seven hundred copies printed off; and, allowing a hundred for a *first* edition, he varied the title-pages of the remaining six hundred by the words—"Second Edition"—"Third Edition"—"Fourth Edition"—"Fifth Edition"—"Sixth Edition"—and "Seventh Edition."

By the time that the fourth edition had been announced, there existed a real rage for the book; the circulating libraries at the West End of the Town were besieged by applicants for a perusal of the work; and "notices," "reviews," and "extracts" began to make their appearance with increasing frequency in the newspapers. The idea of the work was admirable. *Tippetiwink*, the hero, was a young gentleman of ancient family—an only child—kidnapped away in his infancy by the malignant agency of "the demon *Mowbray*" a distant relative, of a fierce temper and wicked character, who by these means succeeded to the enjoyment of the estate, and would have come in time, to the honours and estates of the most ancient and noble family in the kingdom, the *Earl of Frizzleton*. Poor *Tippetiwink* was at length, however, discovered by his illustrious kinsman, by mere accident, in an obscure capacity, in the employ of a benevolent linen-draper, *Black-bag*, who was described as one of the most amiable and generous of linendrapers; and after a series of wonderful adventures, in which the hero displayed the most heroic constancy, the Earl succeeded in reinstating his oppressed and injured kinsman in the lofty station which he ought always to have occupied. His daughter—a paragon of female loveliness—the *Lady Sapphira Sigh-away*—evinced the deepest interest in the success of *Tippetiwink*; and at length—the happy result may be guessed. Out of these few and natural incidents, Mr. Bladdery Pip was pronounced at length, by those (*i.e.*, the aforesaid newspaper scribes) who govern, if they do not indeed constitute public opinion, to have produced an imperishable record of his genius, avoiding all the faults, and combining all the excellences, of all his former productions. The identity between *Titmouse* and *Tippetiwink*, Lord *Dreddlington* and *Lord Frizzleton*, *Lady Cecilia* and *Lady Sapphira*, and Mr. *Aubrey* and "*the demon Mowbray*," was quickly established. The novel passed speedily into the tenth edition; an undoubted, and a very great sensation was produced; extracts descriptive of the persons, particularly that of *Titmouse*, and the Earl, and *Lady Cecilia*, figuring in the story, were given in the London papers, and thence transferred into those all over the country. The very author, Mr. Bladdery Pip, became a resuscitated lion, and dressing himself in the most exquisite style, had his portrait, looking most intensely intellectual, prefixed to the tenth edition. Then came portraits of "*Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq.*" (for which he had never sat), giving him large melting eyes, and a very pensive face, and a most fashionable dress. The Earl of *Dreddlington* and *Lady Cecilia* became almost a lion and lioness. Hundreds of opera-glasses were directed, at once, to their box; innumerable were the anxious salutations they received as they drove round the Park—and they drove round it three or four times as often as they had ever done before. 'Twas whispered that the King had read the book, and drank the Earl's health, under the name of Lord *Frizzleton*—while the Queen did the same for *Lady Cecilia* as *Lady Sapphira*. Their appearance produced a manifest sensation at both the levee and drawing-room—Majesty looked blander than usual as they approached. Poor Lord *Dreddlington* and *Lady Cecilia* mounted in a trice into the seventh heaven of rapturous excitement; for there was that buoyant quality about their heads which secured them a graceful and rapid upward motion. They were both unutterably happy, living in a gentle, delicious tumult of excited feelings. Irrepressible exultation glistened in the Earl's eyes; he threw an indefinite deal

of blandness and courtesy into his manners wherever he was and whomsoever he addressed, as if he could now easily afford it, confident in the inaccessible sublimity of his position. It was slightly laughable to observe, however, the desperate efforts he made to maintain his former frigid composure of manner—but in vain; his nervousness looked almost like a sudden, though gentle, accession of St. Vitus's dance. Innumerable were the inquiries made after Titmouse—his person—his manners—his character—his dress, by her friends, of Lady Cecilia. Young ladies tormented her for his autograph. 'Twas with her as if the level surface of the Dead Sea had been stirred by the freshening breeze.

When a thing of this sort is once fairly set going, where is it to end? When fashion does go mad, her madness is wonderful; and she very soon turns the world mad. Presently the young men appeared everywhere in black satin stocks, embroidered, some with flowers, and others with gold, and which went by the name of "*Titmouse Ties*," and in hats, with high crowns and rims a quarter of an inch in depth, called "*Tittlebats*." All the young blades about town, especially in the city, dressed themselves in the most extravagant style; an amazing impetus was given to the cigar trade—whose shops were crowded, especially at nights, and every puppy that walked the streets puffed cigar-smoke in your eyes. In short, pert and lively *Titmice* might be seen hopping about the streets in all directions. As for Tag-rag, wonders befell him. A paragraph in a paper pointed him out as the original of Black-bag, and his shop in Oxford Street as the scene of Titmouse's service. Thither quickly poured the tide of fashionable curiosity and custom. His business was soon trebled. He wore his best clothes every day, and smirked and smiled, and bustled about amidst the crowd in his shop, in a fever of excitement. He began to think of buying the adjoining premises, and adding them to his own; and set his name down as a subscriber of half-a-guinea a-year to the "Decayed Drapers' Association." These were glorious times for Mr. Tag-rag. He had to engage a dozen extra hands; there were seldom less than fifty or a hundred persons in his shop at once; strings of carriages before his door, sometimes two deep, and strugglings between the coachmen for precedence; in fact, he believed that the MILLENNIUM (about which he had often heard wonders from Mr. Dismal Horror, who, it seemed, knew all about it—a fact of which he had first persuaded his congregation, and then himself) was coming in earnest.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE undulations of the popular excitement in town were not long in reaching the calm retreat of Titmouse in Yorkshire. To say nothing of his having on several occasions observed artists busily engaged in sketching different views of the Hall and its surrounding scenery, and on inquiry, discovered that they were sent from town for the express purpose of presenting to the public sketches of the "residence of Mr. Titmouse;" a copy of the inimitable performance of Mr. Bladdery Pip—viz., "*Tippetiwink*," (tenth edition)—was sent down to Mr. Titmouse by Gammon; who also forwarded to him, from time to time, newspapers containing those paragraphs which identified Titmouse with the hero of the novel, and also testified the profound impression which it was making upon the thinking classes of the community. Was Titmouse's wish to witness the ferment he had so unconsciously produced in the metropolis unreasonable?

Yatton was beginning to look duller daily, even before the arrival of this stimulating intelligence from town; Titmouse feeling quite out of his element. So—Gammon *non contradicente*—up came Titmouse to town. If he had not been naturally a fool, the notice he attracted in London must soon have made him one. He had been for coming up in a postchaise and four; but Gammon, in a letter, succeeded in dissuading him from incurring so useless an expense, assuring him that men of as high consideration as himself constantly availed themselves of the safe and rapid transit afforded by the royal mail. His valet, on being appealed to, corroborated Mr. Gammon's representations; adding, that the late hour in the evening at which the mail arrived in town would effectually shroud him from public observation. Giving strict and repeated orders to his valet to deposit him at once "in a first-rate West-End hotel," the haughty Lord of Yatton, plentifully provided with cigars, stepped into the mail, his valet perched upon the box-seat. That functionary was well acquainted with town, and resolved on his master's taking up his quarters at the Harcourt Hotel, in the immediate vicinity of Bond Street. The mail passed the Peacock, at Islington, about half-past eight o'clock; and long before they had reached even that point, the eager and anxious eye of Titmouse had been on the look-out for indications of his celebrity. He was, however, compelled to own that both people and places seemed much as usual—wearing no particular air of excitement. He was a little chagrined, till he reflected on the vulgar ignorance of the movements of the great for which the eastern regions of the metropolis were proverbial, and also on the increasing duskiness of the evening, the rapid pace at which the mail rattled along, and the circumstance of his being concealed inside. When his humble hackney coach (its driver a feeble old man, with a wisp of straw for a hatband, and sitting on the rickety box like a heap of dirty old clothes, and the flagging and limping horses looking truly miserable objects) had rumbled slowly up to the lofty and gloomy door of the Harcourt Hotel, it seemed to excite no notice whatever. A tall waiter, in a plain suit of black evening dress, with his hands stuck behind his coat-tails, continued standing in the ample doorway, eyeing the plebeian vehicle which had drawn up, with utter indifference—conjecturing, probably, that it had come to the wrong door. With the same air of provoking superciliousness he stood, till the valet, having jumped down from his seat beside the driver, ran up, and in a peremptory sort of way exclaimed, "Mr. Titmouse, of Yatton!" This stirred the waiter into something like energy.

"Here, sir!" called out Mr. Titmouse from within the coach; and on the waiter's slowly approaching, he inquired in a sufficiently swaggering manner—"Pray, has *the Earl of Dreddlington* been inquiring for me here to-day?" The words seemed to operate like magic, converting the person addressed, in a moment, into a slave—supple and obsequious.

"His lordship has not been here to-day, sir," he replied in a low tone, with a most courteous inclination, gently opening the door, and noiselessly letting down the steps. "Do you alight, sir?" "Why—a—have you room for me, and my fellow there?" "O yes, sir! certainly.—Shall I show you into the coffee-room, sir?" "The coffee-room? Curse the coffee-room, sir! Do you suppose I'm a commercial traveller? Show me into a private room, sir!"

The waiter bowed low; and in silent surprise led Mr. Titmouse to a very spacious and elegantly furnished apartment—where, amidst the blaze of six wax candles, and attended by three waiters, he supped, an hour or two afterwards, in great state—retiring about eleven o'clock to his apartment, overcome with fatigue—and brandy and water: having fortunately escaped the indignity of being forced to sit in the same room where an English nobleman, one or two members of Parliament, and a couple of foreign princes, were sitting sipping their claret, some writing letters, and others conning over the evening

papers. About noon, the next day, he called upon the Earl of Dreddlington; and though, under ordinary circumstances, his lordship would have considered the visit rather unseasonable, he nevertheless received his fortunate and now truly distinguished kinsman with the most urbane cordiality.

At the Earl's suggestion, and with Mr. Gammon's concurrence, Titmouse, within about a week after his arrival in town, took chambers in the Albany, together with the elegant furniture which had belonged to their late tenant, a young officer of distinction, who had shortly before suddenly gone abroad upon a diplomatic mission. Mr. Titmouse soon began to feel, in various ways, the distinction which was attached to his name—commencing, as he did at once, the gay and brilliant life of a man of high fashion, and under the august auspices of the Earl of Dreddlington. Like as a cat, shod with walnut-shells by some merry young scapegrace, doubtless feels more and more astonished and excited at the clatter it makes in scampering up and down the bare echoing floors and staircases; so, in some sort, was it with Titmouse, and the sudden and amazing *éclat* with which all his appearances and movements were attended in the regions of fashion. 'Tis a matter of indifference to a fool, whether you laugh with or at him; so that you do but laugh—an observation which will account for much of the conduct both of Lord Dreddlington and Titmouse. In this short life, and dull world, the thing is—to create a *sensation*, never mind how; and every opportunity of doing so should be gratefully seized hold of, and improved to the uttermost, by those who have nothing else to do, and have an inclination to distinguish themselves from the common herd of mankind. Lord Dreddlington had got so inflated by the attention he excited, that he set down everything he witnessed to the score of deference and admiration. His self-conceit was so intense, that it consumed every vestige of sense he had about him. He stood in solitary grandeur upon the lofty pillar of his pride, inaccessible to ridicule, and insensible indeed of its approach, like *vanity* "on a monument, smiling at" *scorn*. Indeed, "His soul was like a star, and dwelt apart." He did not conceive it possible for any one to laugh at *him*, or anything he might choose to do, or any one he might think fit to associate with and introduce to the notice of society—which kind office he forthwith performed for Titmouse, with whose odd person, and somewhat eccentric dress and demeanour, his lordship (who imagined that the same operation was going on in the minds of other people) was growing daily more familiar. Thus, that which had at first so shocked him, he got at length thoroughly reconciled to, and began to suspect whether it was not assumed by Titmouse out of a daring scorn for the intrusive opinions of the world, which showed a loftiness of spirit akin to his own. Besides, in another point of view—suppose the manner and appearance of Titmouse were ever so absurd, so long as his lordship chose to tolerate them, who should venture to gainsay them? So the Earl asked him frequently to dinner, took him with them when his lordship and Lady Cecilia went out in the evenings; gave him a seat in his carriage when going down to the House; and invited him to accompany him and Lady Cecilia when they either drove or rode round the Park; as to which latter Titmouse's assiduous attention at the riding-school enabled him to appear on horseback without being *glaringly* unequal to the management of his horse, which, however, he once or twice contrived to give an inclination towards backing upon those of Lady Cecilia and the Earl. Titmouse happening to let fall, at the Earl's table, that he had that day ordered an elegant chariot to be built for him, his lordship intimated that a cab was the usual turn-out of a bachelor man of fashion: whereupon Titmouse the next day counter-manded his order, and was fortunate enough to secure a cab which had just been completed for a young nobleman who was unable to pay for it, and whom, consequently, the builder did not care about disappointing. He soon provided

himself with a great horse and a little tiger. What pen can do justice to the feelings with which he first sat down in that cab, yielding upon its well-balanced springs, took the reins from his little tiger, and then heard him jump up behind! As it was a trifle too early for the Park, he suddenly bethought himself of exhibiting his splendours before the establishment of Mr. Tag-rag; so he desired his little imp behind to run and summon his valet, who in a trice came down; and in answer to a question, "whether there wasn't something wanting from a draper or hosier," was informed glibly, that six dozen of best cambric pocket handkerchiefs, a dozen or two pairs of white kid gloves, half-a-dozen stocks, and various other items were "wanting"—(i.e., by the valet himself, for Titmouse was already sufficiently provided). Off, however, he drove, and succeeded at length in reaching the Oxford Street establishment, before the door of which five or six carriages were standing. I should say that, at the moment of Mr. Titmouse's strutting into that scene of his former miserable servitude, he experienced a gush of delight which was sufficient to efface all recollection of the misery, privation, and oppression, endured in his early days. There was presently an evident flutter among the gentlemen engaged behind the counter—for, thought they—it must be "the great Mr. Titmouse!" Tag-rag, catching sight of him, bounced out of his little room, and bustled up to him through the crowd of customers, bowing, scraping, blushing, and rubbing his hands, full of excitement, and exhibiting the most profound obsequiousness. "Hope you're well, sir," he commenced in a low tone, but instantly added, in a louder tone, observing that Titmouse chose to appear to have come upon business, "what can I have the honour to do for you, sir, this morning?" And handing him a stool, Tag-rag, with a respectful air, received a very liberal order from Mr. Titmouse, and minuted it down in his memorandum book.

"Dear me, sir, is that your cab?" said Tag-rag, as, having accompanied Titmouse, bowing every step, to the door, they both stood there for a moment, "I never saw such a beautiful turn-out in my life, sir—" "Ya—a-s. Pretty well—pretty well; but that young rascal of mine's dirtied one of his boots a little—dem him!" and he looked terrors at the tiger. "Oh dear!—so he has; shall I wipe it off, sir? Do let me—" "No, it don't signify much. By the way, Mr. Tag-rag," added Mr. Titmouse in a drawling way, "all well at—at—demme if I've not this moment forgot the name of your place in the country—" "Satin Lodge, sir," said Tag-rag meekly, but with infinite inward uneasiness. "Oh—ay, to be sure. One sees, 'pon my soul, such a lot of places—but—all well?" "All very well, indeed, sir; and constantly talking of you, sir." "Ah—well! My compliments—" here he drew on his second glove, and moved towards his cab, Tag-rag accompanying him—"glad they're well. If ever I'm driving that way—good day!" In popped Titmouse—crack went his whip—away darted the horse—Tag-rag following it with an admiring and anxious eye.

As Mr. Titmouse sat in his new vehicle, on his way to the Park, dressed in the extreme of the mode, his glossy hat perched sideways on his bushy, well-oiled, but somewhat mottled hair; his surtout lined with velvet; his full satin stock, spangled with inwrought gold flowers, and with two splendid pins, connected together with delicate double gold chains; his shirt-collars turned down over his stock; his chased gold eyeglass stuck in his right eye; the stiff wristbands of his shirt turned back over his coat-cuffs; and his hands in snowy kid gloves, holding his whip and reins; when he considered the exquisite figure he must thus present to the eyes of all beholders, and gave them credit for gazing at him with the same sort of feelings which similar sights had, but a few months before, excited in *his* despairing breast, his little cup of happiness was full, and even brimming over. This, though I doubt whether it was a just

reflection, was still a very natural one; for he knew what his own feelings were, though not how weak and absurd they were; and of course judged of others by himself. If the Marquis of Whigborough, with his £200,000 a-year, and 5,000 independent voters at his command, were on his way down to the House, absorbed with anxiety as to the effect of the final threat he was going to make to the Minister, that, unless he had a few strawberry leaves promised him, he should feel it his duty to record his vote against the great bill for "*Giving Every Body Every Thing*," which stood for a third reading that evening; or if the great Duke of —, a glance of whose eye, or a wave of whose hand, would light up an European war, and who might at that moment be balancing in his mind the fate of millions of mankind, as depending upon his fiat for peace or war—I say that if both or either of these personages had passed or met Titmouse, in their cabs (which they were mechanically urging onward, so absorbed the while with their own thoughts, that they scarce knew whether they were in a cab or a handbarrow, in which latter; had it been before their gates, either of them might in his abstraction have seated himself); Titmouse's superior acquaintance with human nature assured him that the sight of his tip-top turn-out could not fail of attracting their attention, and nettling their pride. Whether Milton, if cast on a desolate island, but with the means of writing *Paradise Lost*, would have done so, had he been certain that no human eye would ever peruse a line of it; or whether Mr. Titmouse, had he been suddenly deposited, in his splendid cab, in the midst of the desert of Sahara, with not one of his species to fix an envying eye upon him, would nevertheless have experienced a great measure of satisfaction, I am not prepared to say. As, however, every condition of life has its mixture of good and evil, so, if Titmouse had been placed in the midst of the aforesaid desert at the time when he was last before the reader, instead of dashing along Oxford Street, he would have escaped certain difficulties and dangers which he presently encountered. Had an ape, not acquainted with the science of driving, been put into Titmouse's place, he would probably have driven much in the same style, though he would have had greatly the advantage over his rival in respect of his simple and natural appearance; being, to the eye of correct taste, "when unadorned, adorned the most." Mr. Titmouse, in spite of the assistance to his sight which he derived from his neutral glass, was continually coming into collision with the vehicles which met and passed him, on his way to Cumberland Gate. He got into no fewer than four distinct *rows* (to say nothing of the flying curses which he received in passing) between the point I have named and Mr. Tag-rag's premises. But as he was by no means destitute of spirit, he sat in his cab, on these four occasions, cursing and blaspheming like a little fiend, till he almost brought tears of vexation into the eyes of one or two of his opponents (cads, cab-drivers, watermen, hackney-coachmen, carters, stage coachmen, market-gardeners, and draymen), who unexpectedly found their own weapon—*i.e.*, *slang*—wielded with such superior power and effect, for once in a way, by a swell—an aristocrat. The more manly of his opponents were filled with secret respect for the possessor of such unsuspected powers. Still it was unpleasant for a person of Mr. Titmouse's distinction to be engaged in these conflicts; and he would have given the world to be able to conquer his conceit so far as to summon his little tiger within, and surrender to him the reins. Such a ridiculous confession of his own incapacity, however, he could not think of, and he got into several little disturbances in the Park; after which he drove home; the battered cab had to be taken to the maker's, where the injuries it had sustained were repaired for the trifling sum of forty pounds.

The eminent position secured for Titmouse by the masterly genius of Mr. Bladdery Pip, was continued to him, and strengthened by much more sub-

stantial claims upon the respect of society, possessed by the first-named gentleman. Rumour is a dame that always looks at objects through very strong magnifying-glasses; and, guided by what she saw, she soon gave out that Titmouse was patron of three boroughs, had a clear rent-roll of thirty thousand a-year, and had already received nearly a hundred thousand pounds in hard cash from the previous proprietor of his estates, as a compensation for the back rents, which that usurper had been for so many years in the receipt of. Then he was very near in succession to the ancient and distinguished Barony of Drelincourt, and the extensive estates thereto annexed. He was young; by no means ill-looking; and was—unmarried. Under the mask of *naïveté* and eccentricity, it was believed that he concealed great natural acuteness, for the purpose of ascertaining who were his real and who only his pretended friends and well-wishers; and that his noble relatives had given in to his little scheme for the purpose of aiding him in the important discovery upon which he was bent. Infinite effect was thus given to the Earl's introductions. Wherever Titmouse went he found new and delightful acquaintances; and invitations to dinners, balls, routs, *soirées*, came showering daily into his rooms at the Albany, where also were left innumerable cards, bearing names of very high fashion. All who had daughters or sisters in the market, paid eager and persevering court to Mr. Titmouse, and still more so to the Earl of Dreddlington and Lady Cecilia, his august *sponsors*; so that—such being the will of that merry jade Fortune—they who had once regarded him as an object only of disgust and contempt, and had been disposed to order their servants to show him out again into the streets, were now, in a manner, *magnified and made honourable* by means of their connection with him; or rather, society, through his means, had become suddenly sensible of the commanding qualities and pretensions of the Earl of Dreddlington and the Lady Cecilia. In the ball-room—at Almack's even—how many young men, handsome, accomplished, and of real consequence, applied in vain for the hand of haughty beauty, which Mr. Titmouse had only to ask for, and have! Whose was the opera-box into which he might not drop as a welcome visitor, and be seen lounging in envied familiarity with its fair and brilliant inmates? Were there not mothers of high fashion, of stately pride, of sounding rank, who would have humbled themselves before Titmouse, if thereby he could have been brought a suitor to the feet of one of their daughters? But it was not over the fair sex alone that the magic of Mr. Titmouse's name and pretensions had obtained this great and sudden ascendancy; he excited no small attention among men of fashion—great numbers of whom quickly recognised in him one very fit to become their butt and their dupe. What signified it to men secure of their own position in society, that they were seen openly associating with one so outrageously absurd in his dress—and vulgar and ignorant beyond all example? So long as he bled freely and trotted out briskly and willingly, his eccentricities could be not merely tolerated, but humoured. Take, for instance, the gay and popular Marquis Gants-Jaunes de Millefleurs; but he is worth a word or two of description, because of the position he had contrived to acquire and retain, and the influence which he managed to exercise over a considerable portion of London society. The post he was anxious to secure was that of the leader of *ton*; and he wished it to appear that that was the sole object of his ambition. While, however, he affected to be entirely engrossed by such matters as devising new and exquisite variations of dress and equipage, he was, in reality, bent upon graver pursuits—upon gratifying his own licentious tastes and inclinations with secrecy and impunity. He despised folly, cultivating and practising only vice, in which he was, in a manner, an epicure. He was now about his forty-second year, had been handsome, was of bland and fascinating address, variously accomplished, of exquisite tact, of most refined taste; there was a slight fulness

and puffiness about his features, an expression in his eye which spoke of *satiety*—and the fact was so. He was a very proud, selfish, heartless person; but these qualities he contrived to disguise from many of even his most intimate associates. An object of constant anxiety to him, was to ingratiate himself with the younger and weaker branches of the aristocracy, in order to secure a distinguished status in society; and he succeeded. To gain this point, he taxed all his resources; never were so exquisitely blended, as in his instance, with a view to securing his *influence*, the qualities of dictator and parasite; he always appeared the *agrecable equal* of those whom, for his life, he dared not seriously have offended. He had no fortune; no visible means of making money—did not sensibly sponge upon his friends, nor fall into conspicuous embarrassments, yet he always lived in luxury—without money, he in some inconceivable manner always contrived to be in the possession of money's worth. He had a magical power of soothing querulous tradesmen. He had a knack of always keeping himself, his clique, his sayings and doings, before the eye of the public, in such a manner as to satisfy it that he was the acknowledged leader of fashion; yet it was really no such thing; it was a false fashion, there being all the difference between him and a man of real consequence in society, that there is between mock and real pearl, between paste and diamond. It was true that young men of sounding name and title were ever to be found in his train, thereby giving real countenance to one from whom they fancied that they themselves derived celebrity; thus enabling him to effect a lodgement in the outskirts of aristocracy; but he could not penetrate inland, so to speak, any more than foreign merchants can advance further than to Canton, in the dominions of the Emperor of China. He was only tolerated in the regions of real aristocracy—a fact of which he had a very galling consciousness, though it did not apparently disturb his equanimity, or interrupt the systematic and refined sycophancy by which alone he could secure his precarious position.

With some sad exceptions, I think that Great Britain has reason to be proud of her aristocracy. I do not speak now of those gaudy flaunting personages, of either sex, who, by their excesses or eccentricities, are eternally obtruding themselves, their manners, dress, and equipage, upon the offended ear and eye of the public; but of those who occupy their exalted sphere in simplicity, in calmness, and in unobtrusive dignity and virtue. I am no flatterer or idolater of the aristocracy. I have a profound sense of the necessity and advantage of the *institution*; but I shall ever pay its members, personally, an honest homage only, after a stern and keen scrutiny into their personal pretensions; thinking of them ever in the spirit of those memorable words of Scripture—“*Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required,*” and that not hereafter only, but here also. No one would visit their faults and follies with a more unsparing severity than I; yet, making all just allowances for their peculiar perils and temptations, exposed as they are, especially at the period of their entrance upon life, to sedulous and systematic sycophancy, too often also to artful and designing profligacy. Can, however, anything excite greater indignation and disgust in the mind of a thoughtful and independent observer, than the instances occasionally exhibited of persons of rank presumptuously imagining that they enjoy a sort of prescriptive immunity from the consequences of misconduct? An insolent or profligate nobleman is a spectacle becoming every day more dangerous to exhibit in this country; of that he may be assured.

These are the sentiments of one who, if their order were in jeopardy, would, with the immense majority of his brethren of the middle classes, freely shed his blood in defence of that order; for its preservation is essential to the well-being of society, and its privileges are really ours.

To return, however, to the Marquis. The means to which, as I have above explained, he resorted for the purpose, secured him a certain species of permanent popularity. In matters of dress and equipage, he could really set the fashion; and being something of a practical humourist, and desirous of frequent exhibitions of his power, in order to enhance his pretensions with his patrons—and also greatly applauded and indulged by the tradespeople profiting by the vagaries of fashion, he was very capricious in the exercise of his influence. He seized the opportunity of the advent of my little hero, to display his powers very decisively! He waved his wand over Titmouse, and instantly transformed a little ass into a great lion. 'Twas the Marquis, who with his own hand sketched off, from fancy, the portrait of Titmouse, causing it to be exhibited in almost every bookseller's shop window. He knew that, if he chose to make his appearance once or twice in the Parks, and leading streets and squares, in—for instance—the full and imposing evening costume of the clown at the theatre, with painted face, capacious white inexpressibles, and tasteful cap and jacket—within a few days' time several thousands of clowns would make their appearance about town, turning it into a vast pantomime. Could a more striking instance of the Marquis's power in such matters have been exhibited, than that which had actually occurred in the case of Titmouse? Soon after the novel of Tippetiwink had rendered our friend an object of public interest the Marquis happened, somewhere or other, to catch a glimpse of the preposterous little ape. His keen eye caught all Titmouse's personal peculiarities at a glance; and a day or two afterwards appeared in public, a sort of splendid edition of Titmouse—with quizzing-glass stuck in his eye and cigar in his mouth; taper ebony cane; tight surtout, with the snowy corner of a white handkerchief peeping out of the outside breast-pocket; hat with scarce any rim, perched slantingly on his head; satin stock bespangled with inwrought gold flowers; shirt-collar turned down; and that inimitable strut of his!—'Twas enough; the thoughtful young men about town were staggered for a moment; but their senses soon returned. The Marquis had set the thing a-going; and within three days' time, that bitter wag had called forth a flight of *Titmice* that would have reminded you, for a moment, of the visitation of locusts brought upon Egypt by Moses. Thus was brought about the state of things recorded towards the close of the preceding chapter of this history. As soon as the Marquis had seen a few of the leading fools about town fairly in the fashion, he resumed his former rigid simplicity of attire, and, accompanied by a friend or two in his confidence, walked about the town enjoying his triumph; witnessing his trophies—"Tittlebats" and "Titmouse ties"—filling the shop windows on the week-days, and peopling the streets on Sundays. The Marquis was not long in obtaining an introduction to the quaint little *millionaire*, whose reputation he had, conjointly with his distinguished friend Mr. Bladdery Pip, contributed so greatly to extend. Titmouse, who had often heard of him, looked upon him with inconceivable reverence, and accepted an invitation to one of the Marquis's *recherché* Sunday dinners, with a sort of tremulous ecstasy. Thither, on the appointed day, he went accordingly, and, by his original humour, afforded infinite amusement to the Marquis's other guests. 'Twas lucky for Titmouse that, getting dreadfully drunk very early in the evening, he was quite incapacitated from accompanying his brilliant and good natured host to one or two scenes of fashionable entertainment, as had been arranged, in St. James's Street.

Now, do let us pause to ask whether this poor little creature was not to be pitied? Did he not seem to have been plucked out of his own sphere of safe and comparatively happy obscurity, only in order to become every one's game—an object of everybody's cupidity and cruelty? May he not be compared to the flying fish, who, springing out of the water to avoid his deadly pursuer

there, is instantly pounced upon by his ravenous assailants in the air? In the lower, and in the upper regions of society, was not this the condition of poor Tittlebat Titmouse? Was not his long coveted advancement merely a transition from scenes of vulgar to refined rapacity? Had he, ever since "*luck* had happened to him," had one single *friend* to whisper in his ear one word of pity and of disinterested counsel? In the splendid regions which he had entered, who regarded him otherwise than as a legitimate object for plunder or ridicule, the latter disguised by the *designing* only? Was not even his dignified and exemplary old kinsman, the Earl of Dreddlinton, Right Honourable as he was, influenced solely by considerations of paltry self-interest? Had he not his own ridiculous and mercenary designs to accomplish, amidst all the attentions he vouchsafed to bestow upon Titmouse? In the progress of society we have, in a measure dropped the physical part of the business; and instead of punching, scratching, kicking, biting, and knocking down one another, still true to the original principles of our nature, we are all endeavouring to circumvent one another; everybody is trying to take everybody in; the moment that one of us has got together a thing or two, he is pounced upon by his neighbour, who in his turn falls a prey to another, and so on in endless succession.

The more that the Earl and Lady Cecilia perceived of Titmouse's popularity, the more eager were they in parading their connection with him, and openly investing him with the character of a *protégé*. In addition to this, the Lady Cecilia had begun to have now and then a glimmering notion of the objects which the Earl was contemplating. If the Earl took him down to the House of Lords, and having secured him a place at the bar, would immediately on entering, walk up to him, and be seen for some time condescendingly pointing out to him the different peers by name, as they entered, and explaining to his intelligent auditor the period, and mode, and cause, of the creation and accession of many of them to their honours, and also the forms, ceremonies, and routine of business in the House; so Lady Cecilia was not remiss in availing herself, in her way, of the little opportunities which presented themselves. She invited him, for instance, one day early in the week to accompany them to church on the ensuing Sunday, and during the interval gave out amongst her intimate friends that they might expect to see Mr. Titmouse in her papa's pew. He accepted the invitation; and, on the arrival of the appointed hour, might have been seen in the Earl's carriage, driving to afternoon service at the Reverend Morphine Velvet's chapel—Rosemary Chapel, near St. James's Square. 'Twas a fashionable chapel, a chapel of *Ease*; rightly so called, for it was a very *easy* mode of worship, discipline, and doctrine that was there practised and inculcated. If I may not irreverently adopt the language of scripture, but apply it very differently, I should say that Mr. Morphine Velvet's yoke was *very* "easy," his burden *very* "light." He was a popular preacher; middle-aged; sleek, serene, solemn in his person and demeanour. He had a very gentlemanlike appearance in the pulpit and reading desk. There was a sort of soothing, winning, elegance and tenderness in the tone and manner in which he *prayed* and *besought* his dearly beloved brethren, as many as were there present, to accompany him, their bland and graceful pastor, to the throne of the heavenly grace. Fit leader was he of such a flock! He read the prayers remarkably well, in a quiet and subdued tone, very distinctly, and with marked emphasis and intonation, having sedulously studied how to read the service under a crack theatrical teacher of elocution, who had given him several "points"—in fact, a new reading entirely of one of the clauses in the Lord's prayer, and which, he had the gratification of perceiving; produced a striking, if not, indeed, a startling effect. On the little finger of the hand which he used most, was to be observed the sparkle of a diamond

ring; and there was a sort of careless grace in the curl of his hair, which it had taken his hair-dresser at least half an hour, before Mr. Velvet's leaving home for his chapel, to effect. In the pulpit he was calm and fluent. He rightly considered that the pulpit ought not to be the scene for attempting intellectual display; he took care, therefore, that there should be nothing in his sermons to arrest the understanding, or unprofitably occupy it, addressing himself entirely to the feelings and fancy of his cultivated audience, in frequently interesting imaginative compositions. On the occasion I am speaking of, he took for his text a fearful passage of scripture, 2 Cor. iv. 3.—“*But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.*” If any words were calculated to startle such a congregation as was arrayed before Mr. Velvet, out of their guilty and fatal apathy, were not these? Ought not their minister to have looked round him and trembled? So one would have thought; but “*dear Mr. Velvet*” knew his mission and his flock better. He presented them with an elegant description of heaven, with its crystal battlements, its jasper walls, its buildings of pure gold, its foundations of precious stones; its balmy air, its sound of mysterious melody, its overflowing fulness of everlasting happiness—amidst which friends, parted upon earth by the cruel stroke of death, recognize and are re-united to each other, never more to pronounce the agonizing word “*adieu!*” And would his dear hearers be content to lose all this—content to *enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season?* Forbid it, eternal mercy! But lest a strain like this should disturb or distress his hearers, he took the opportunity to enforce and illustrate the consolatory truth that—

“Religion never was design'd
To make our pleasures less;”

and presently resuming the thread of his discourse, went on to speak of the really serious consequences attending a persevering indifference to religion; and proceeded to give striking instances of it in—the merchant in his counting-house, and on 'change; the lawyer in his office; the tradesman in his shop; the operative in the manufactory; showing how each was absorbed in his calling—*labouring for the meat which perisheth*, till he had lost all appetite and relish for spiritual food, and never once troubled himself about “the momentous concerns of hereafter!” Upon these topics he dwelt with such force and feeling, that he sent his distinguished congregation away—those of them, at least, who could retain any recollection of what they had heard for five minutes after entering their carriages—fearing that there was a very black look-out, indeed, for—the kind of persons that Mr. Velvet had mentioned—tailors, milliners, mercers, jewellers, and so forth: and who added graver offences, and of a more positive character to the misconduct which had been pointed out—in their extortion and their rapacity! Would that some of them had been present!—Thus was it that dear Mr. Velvet sent away his hearers overflowing with Christian sympathy; very well pleased with Mr. Velvet, but infinitely better pleased with themselves. The deep impression which he had made was evidenced by a note he received that evening from the Duchess of Broadacre, most earnestly begging permission to copy his “beautiful sermon,” in order to send it to her sister, Lady Belle Almacks, who (through early dissipation) was ill of a decline at Naples. About that time, I may as well here mention, there came out an engraved portrait of “the Rev. Morphine Velvet, M.A., Minister of Rosemary Chapel, St. James's”—a charming picture it was, representing the aforesaid Mr. Velvet in pulpit costume and attitude, with hands gracefully outstretched, and his face directed upward with a heavenly expression; suggesting to you the possibility that some fine day, when his hearers least expected it, he might gently rise out of his pulpit

into the air, like Stephen, with heaven open before him, and *be no more seen of men!*

Four or five carriages had to set down before that containing the Earl of Dreddlington, Lady Cecilia, and Mr. Titmouse, could draw up; by which time there had accumulated as many in its rear, so eager were the pious aristocrats to get into this holy retreat. As Titmouse holding his hat and cane in one hand, while with the other he arranged his hair, strutted up the centre aisle following the Earl and Lady Cecilia he could hardly repress the exultation with which he thought of a former visit of his to that very chapel some two years before. *Then*, on attempting to enter the body of the chapel, the verger had politely but firmly repulsed him; on which, swelling with vexation, he had ascended to the gallery, where, after being kept standing for ten minutes at least, he had been beckoned by the pew-opener towards, and squeezed into the furthestmost pew, close at the back of the organ, and in which said pews were only four footmen besides himself; and if he were disgusted with his mere contiguity, guess what must have been his feelings when the footman nearest to him good-naturedly forced upon him a part of his prayer-book which Titmouse, ready to spit in his face, held with his finger and thumb as though it had been the tail of a snake. *Now*, how changed was all! He had become an aristocrat; in his veins ran some of the richest and oldest blood in the country; his brow might ere long be graced by the coronet which King Henry II. had placed upon the brow of the founder of his family some seven hundred years before; and a tall footman, with powdered head, glistening silver shoulder-knot, and sky-blue livery, and carrying in a bag the gilded implements of devotion, was humbly following behind him! What a remarkable and vivid contrast between his present and his former circumstances, was present at that moment to his reflecting mind! As he stood his hat covering his face, in an attitude of devotion—"I wonder," thought he, "what all these nobles and swells would say, if they knew how I had worshipped here on the last time?" and again—"Pon my life, what would I give for—say Huckaback—to see me just now!" What an elegant and fashionable air the congregation wore! Surely there must be something in religion when people such as were around him came so punctually to church and behaved so seriously! The members of that congregation were, indeed exemplary in their strict discharge of their public religious duties! Scarce one of them was there who had not been at the opera till half-past twelve over-night; the dulcet notes of the singers still thrilling in their ears, the graceful attitudes of the dancers still present to their eyes; every previous night of the week had they been engaged in the brilliant ball-room, and whirled in the mazes of the voluptuous waltz, or glittering in the picturesque splendour of fancy dress, till three, four, and five o'clock in the morning; yet here they were in the house of God, in spite of all their exhaustion, testified by the heavy eye, the ill-suppressed yawn, the languor and *ennui* visible in their countenances, prepared to accompany their polite pastor, "with a pure heart and humble voice unto the throne of the heavenly grace," to acknowledge, with lively emotion, that they "had followed too much the devices and desires of their own hearts;" praying for "mercy upon them, miserable offenders," that God would "restore them, being penitent," so that "they might thereafter lead a godly, righteous, and sober life." Here they were punctual to their time, decorous in manner, devout in spirit, earnest and sincere in repentance and good resolutions—knowing, nevertheless the while, how would be spent the remainder of the season—of their *lives*; and yet resolving to attend to the affectionate entreaties of Mr. Velvet, to be "*not hearers only, but doers of the word.*" Generally, I should say, that the state of mind of most, if not all of these present, was analogous to that of persons

who go and sit in the pump-room, to drink the Bath or Cheltenham waters. Everybody did the same thing; and each hoped that, while sitting in his pew, what he heard would, like what he drank in the pump-room, in some secret mode of operation, insensibly benefit the hearer without subjecting him to any unpleasant restraint or discipline—without requiring active exertion, or inconvenience, or sacrifice. This will give you a pretty accurate notion of Lord Dreddlington's state of mind upon the present occasion. With his gold glasses on, he followed with his eye, and also with his voice, every word of the prayers, with rigid accuracy and unwavering earnestness; but as soon as Mr. Velvet had mounted the pulpit, and risen to deliver his discourse, the Earl quietly folded his arms, closed his eyes, and, in an attentive posture, dignifiedly composed himself to sleep. Lady Cecilia sat beside him perfectly motionless during the whole sermon, her eyes fixed languidly upon the preacher. As for Titmouse he bore it pretty well for about five minutes; then he pulled his gloves off and on at least twenty times; then he twisted his handkerchief round his fingers; then he looked with a vexed air at his watch; then he stuck his glass in his eye, and stared about him. By the time that Mr. Velvet had ceased, Titmouse had conceived a very great dislike to him, and was indeed in a fretful humour. But when the organ struck up, and they rose to go; when he mingled with the soft, crushing, fluttering, rustling, satin-clad throng—nodding to one, bowing to another, and shaking hands with a third, he felt “himself again.” The only difference between him and those around him was, that they had learned to bear with calm fortitude what had so severely tried his temper. All were glad to get out: the crash of carriages at the door was music in their ears—the throng of servants delightful objects to their eyes—they were in short, in the dear world again, and breathed as freely as ever.

Mr. Titmouse took leave of the Earl and Lady Cecilia at their carriage door, having ordered his cab to be in waiting, as it was; and entering it, he drove about leisurely until it was time to think of dressing for dinner. He had accepted an invitation to dine with a party of officers in the Guards, and a merry time they had on't. Titmouse in due time got blind drunk; and then one of his companions, rapidly advancing towards the same happy state, seized the opportunity, with a burned cork, to blacken poor Titmouse's face all over, who, therefore, was pronounced to bear a very close resemblance to one of the black boys belonging to the band of the regiment, and thus afforded as much fun to his friends when dead drunk as when sober. As he was quite incapable of taking care of himself, they put a servant with him into his cab (judging his little tiger to be unequal to the responsibility).

Titmouse passed a sad night, but got better towards the middle of the ensuing day; when he was sufficiently recovered to receive two visitors. One of them was young Lord Frederic Feather (accompanied by a friend), both of whom had dined in company with Titmouse overnight; and his lordship it was, who having decorated Titmouse's countenance in the way I have described, so as to throw his valet almost into fits on seeing him brought home, imagining it might possibly come to his ears who it was that had done him such a favour, had come to acknowledge and apologize for it frankly and promptly. When, however, he perceived what a fool he had got to deal with, he suddenly changed his course, declared that Titmouse had not only done it himself, but had then presumed to act similarly towards his lordship, whose friend corroborated the charge, and they had called to receive, in private, an apology. Titmouse's breath seemed taken away on first hearing this astounding version of the affair. He swore he had done nothing of the sort, but had suffered a good deal; dropping, however, a little on observing the stern looks of his companions, he protested that “he did not recollect” anything of the sort: on which they smiled good-naturedly, and said that *that* was very possible. Then

Titmouse made the requisite apology; and thus this "awkward affair" ended. Lord Frederic continued for some time with Titmouse in pleasant chat; for he foresaw that, "hard-up" as he frequently was, Mr. Titmouse was a friend who might be exceedingly serviceable. In fact, poor Lord Frederic could, on that very occasion, have almost gone on his knees for a cheque of Mr. Titmouse upon his bankers, for three or four hundred pounds. Oh, thought that "noble" young spark, what would *he* have given to be in Titmouse's position, with his twenty thousand a-year, and a hundred thousand pounds of hard cash! But as the reader well knows, poor Titmouse's resources, ample as they were, were upon a far less splendid scale than was supposed. Partly from inclination, and partly through a temporary sense of embarrassment, occasioned by the want of ready money, Titmouse did not spend a tenth part of the sum which it had been everywhere supposed he could disburse freely on all hands: and this occasioned him to be given credit for possessing all that rumour assigned to him; and, moreover, for a disposition not to squander it. He had on several occasions been induced to try his hand at *écarté*, *rouge et noir*, and *hazard*; and had, on the first occasion or two, been a little hurried away through deference to his distinguished associates, and bled rather freely; but when he found that it was a matter of business—that he must *pay*—and felt his purse growing lighter, and his pocket-book, in which he kept his bank-notes, rapidly shrinking in dimensions as the evening wore on, he experienced vivid alarm and disgust, and an increasing disinclination to be victimized; and his aversion to play was infinitely strengthened by the frequent cautions of his distinguished and disinterested monitor, the Earl of Dreddlington.

But there was one step in Mr. Titmouse's upward progress which he presently took, and which is worthy of special mention; I mean his presentation at court by the Earl of Dreddlington. The necessity for such a step was explained to Titmouse, by his illustrious kinsman, a day or two after the appearance of the ordinary official announcement of the next levee. This momentous affair was broached by the Earl, one day after dinner, with an air of deep anxiety and interest. Indeed, had that stately and solemn old simpleton been instructing his gaping protégé in the minutely-awful etiquettes requisite for the due discharge of his duties as an ambassador sent upon a delicate and embarrassing mission to the court of his Sacred Majesty the King of Sulky-punctilio, he could not have appeared more penetrated by a sense of the responsibility he was incurring. He commenced by giving Titmouse a very long history of the origin and progress of such ceremonies, and a minute account of the practical manner of their observance, all of which, however, was to Titmouse only like breathing upon a mirror, passing as quickly out of one ear as it had entered into the other. When, however, the Earl came to the point of dress, Titmouse was indeed "a thing all ear, all eye," his faculties being stimulated to their utmost. The next morning he hurried off to his tailor, to order a court dress. When it had been brought to his rooms, and he had put it on, upon returning to his room in his new and imposing costume, and glancing at his figure in the glass, his face fell; he felt infinitely disappointed. After gazing at himself for a few moments in silence, he suddenly snapped his fingers, and exclaimed to the tailor, who, with the valet, was standing beside him, "Curse me if I like this thing at all!" "Not like it, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Clipclose, with astonishment. "No, I don't, demme! Is *this* a court dress? It's a quaker's made into a footman's! 'Pon my soul, I look the exact image of a footman; and a devilish vulgar one, too!" The two individuals beside him turned suddenly away from him, and from one another, and from their noses there issued the sounds of ill-suppressed laughter. "Oh, sir, I beg a thousand pardons!" quickly exclaimed Mr. Clipclose, "what can I have been thinking about? There's the sword, we've quite

forgot it!" "Ah, 'pon my life, I thought there was *something* wronged!" quoth Titmouse, as Mr. Clipclose, having brought the sword from the *other* end of the room, where he had laid it upon entering, buckled it on. "I flatter myself that *now*, sir—" commenced he.

"Ya—as—Quite the correct thing! 'Pon my soul, most uncommon striking!"—exclaimed Titmouse, glancing at his figure in the glass with a triumphant smile. "Isn't it odd, now, that this sword should make all the difference between me and a footman, by Jove?" Here his two companions were seized with a simultaneous fit of coughing.

"Ah, ah—it's *so*, a'n't it?" continued Titmouse, his eyes glued to the glass. "Certainly, sir: it undoubtedly gives—what shall I call it? a grace—a finish—a sort of commanding—especially to a figure that becomes it"—he continued, with cool assurance, observing that the valet understood him. "But—may I, sir, take so great a liberty? If you are not accustomed to wear a sword—as I think you said you had not been at court before—I beg to remind you that it will require particular care to manage it, and prevent it from getting between—"

"Demme, sir!" exclaimed Titmouse, starting aside with an offended air—"d'ye think I don't know how to manage a sword? By all that's tremendous"—and plucking the taper weapon out of its scabbard, he waved it over his head; and throwing himself into the first position—he had latterly paid a good deal of attention to fencing—and with rather an excited air, he went through several of the preliminary movements. 'Twas a subject for a painter, and exhibited a very striking spectacle—as an instance of power silently concentrated, and ready to be put forth upon an adequate occasion. The tailor and the valet, who stood separate from each other, and at a safe and respectful distance from Mr. Titmouse, gazed with silent admiration at him.

When the great day arrived—Titmouse having thought of scarce anything else in the interval, and teased every one he met with his endless questions and childish observations on the subject—he drove up, at the appointed hour, to the Earl of Dreddlington's, whose carriage, with an appearance of greater state than usual about it, was standing at the door. On alighting from his cab, he skipped so nimbly upstairs that he could not have had time to observe the amusement which his figure occasioned even to the well-disciplined servants of the Earl of Dreddlington. Much allowance ought to have been made for them. Think of Mr. Titmouse's little knee-breeches, white silks, silver shoe-buckles, shirt-ruffles and frills, coat, bag, and sword; and his hair, plastered up with bear's grease, parted down the middle of his head, and curling out boldly over each temple; and his open countenance irradiated with a subdued smile of triumph and excitement! On entering the drawing-room, he beheld a really striking object—the Earl in court costume, wearing his general's uniform, with all his glistening orders, standing in readiness to set off, and holding in his hand his hat, with its snowy plume. His posture was at once easy and commanding. Had he been standing to Sir Thomas Lawrence, he could not have disposed himself more effectively. Lady Cecilia was sitting on the sofa, leaning back and languidly talking to him; and from the start they both gave on Titmouse's entrance, it was plain that they could not have calculated upon the extraordinary transmogrification he must have undergone in assuming court costume. For a moment or two each was as severely shocked as when his absurd figure had first presented itself in that drawing-room. "Oh, heavens!" murmured Lady Cecilia: while the Earl seemed struck dumb by the approaching figure of Titmouse. That gentleman, however, was totally changed from the Titmouse of a former day. He had now acquired a due sense of his personal importance, a just confidence in himself. Greatness had lost its former petrifying influence over him. And,

as for his appearance on the present occasion, he had grown so familiar with it, as reflected in his glass, that it never occurred to him as being different with others who beheld him for the first time. At the same time, that candour upon which I pride myself urges me to state that when Titmouse beheld the military air and superb equipments of the Earl—notwithstanding that Titmouse, too, wore a sword—he felt himself *done*. He advanced, however, pretty confidently—bobbing about, first to Lady Cecilia, and then to the Earl; and after a hasty salutation—“’Pon my life, my lord, I hope it’s no offence, but your lordship *does* look most *particular* fine.” The Earl made no reply, but inclined towards him magnificently—not seeing the meaning and intention of Titmouse, but affronted by his words.

“May I ask what your lordship thinks of *me*? First time I ever appeared in this kind of thing, my lord—ha! ha, your lordship sees!” As he spoke, his look and voice betrayed the overawing effects of the Earl’s splendid appearance, which was rapidly freezing up the springs of familiarity, if not, indeed of flippancy, which were bubbling up within the little bosom of Titmouse, on his entering the room. His manner became involuntarily subdued and reverential. The Earl of Dreddlington in plain clothes, and in full court costume were two very different persons; though his lordship would have been mortally affronted if he had known that any one thought so. However, he now regretted having offered to take Titmouse to the levee, there was no escape from the calamity; so, after a few minutes’ pause, he rang the bell, and announced his readiness to set off. Followed by Mr. Titmouse, his lordship slowly descended the stairs; and when he was within two or three steps of the hall floor, it distresses me to relate, that he fell nearly flat upon his face, and, but for his servant’s rushing up would have been seriously hurt. Poor Titmouse had been the occasion of this disaster, for his sword getting between his legs, down he went against the Earl, who went naturally down upon the floor, as I have mentioned. Titmouse was not much hurt, but terribly frightened, and went as pale as death when he looked at the Earl, who appeared a little agitated, but, not having been really injured, soon recovered his self-possession. Profuse were poor Titmouse’s apologies, as may be supposed; but much as he was distressed at what had taken place, a glance at the angry countenances with which the servants regarded him, as if inwardly cursing his stupidity and clumsiness, stirred up his spirit a little, and restored him to a measure of self-possession. He would have given a hundred pounds to have been able to discharge every one of them on the spot.

“Sir—enough has been said,” quoth the Earl, rather coldly and haughtily, tired of the multiplied apologies and excuses of Titmouse. “I thank God, sir, that I am not hurt, though, at my time of life, a fall is not a slight matter. Sir,” continued the Earl, bitterly, “*you* are not so much to blame as your tailor; he should have explained to you how to wear your sword!” With this, having cut Titmouse to the very quick, the Earl motioned him towards the door: they soon entered the carriage; the door was closed; and, with a brace of footmen behind, away rolled these two truly distinguished subjects to pay their homage to majesty—which might well be proud of such homage. They both sat in silence for some time. At length—“Beg your lordship’s pardon,” quoth Titmouse, with some energy; “but I wish your lordship only knew how I hate this cursed skewer that’s pinned to me;” and he looked at his sword as if he could have snapped it into halves, and thrown them through the window.

“Sir, I can appreciate your feelings. The sword was not to blame; and *you* have my forgiveness,” replied the still ruffled Earl.

“Much obliged to your lordship,” replied Titmouse, in a somewhat different tone from any in which he had ever ventured to address his august com-

panion; for he was beginning to feel nettled at the bitter contemptuous manner which the Earl observed towards him. He was also not a little enraged with himself; for he knew he had been in fault, and thought of the neglected advice of his tailor. So his natural insolence, like a reptile just beginning to recover from its long torpor, made a faint struggle to show itself—but in vain; he was quite cowed and overpowered by the presence in which he was, and he wished heartily that he could have recalled even the last few words he had ventured to utter. The Earl had observed it, though without appearing to do so. He was accustomed to control his feelings; and on the present occasion he exerted himself to do so, for fear of alienating Titmouse from him by any display of offended dignity.

"Sir, it is a very fine day," he observed in a kind manner, after a stern silence for at least five minutes.

"Remarkable fine, my lord. I was just going to say so," replied Titmouse, greatly relieved; and presently they fell into their usual strain of conversation.

"We must learn to bear these little annoyances calmly," said the Earl graciously, on Titmouse's again alluding to his mishap;—"as for me, sir, a person in the station to which it has pleased Heaven to call me, for purposes of its own, has his peculiar and very grave anxieties—substantial anx——"

He ceased suddenly. The carriage of his old rival, the Earl of Fitz-Walter, passed him; the latter waved his hand courteously; the former, with a bitter smile, was forced to do the same; and then, relapsing into silence, showed that the iron was entering his very soul, affording a striking illustration of the truth of the observation he had been making to Titmouse. Soon, however, they had entered the scene of splendid hubbub, which at once occupied and excited both their minds. Without, was the eager crowd, gazing with admiration and awe at each equipage, with its brilliant occupants, that dashed past them:—then the life-guardsmen, in glittering and formidable array their long gleaming swords and polished helmets glancing and flashing in the sunlight. Within, were the tall yeomen of the guard, in velvet caps and scarlet uniforms, and with ponderous partisans, lining each side of the staircase—and who, being in the exact military costume of the time of Henry the Eighth, forcibly recalled those days of pomp and pageantry to the well-informed mind of Mr. Titmouse. In short, there were all the grandeur, state, and ceremony that fence in the dread approaches to majesty. Fortunately, Titmouse was infinitely too much bewildered and flustered by the novel splendour around him, to be aware of the ill-concealed laughter which his appearance excited on all hands. In due course he was borne on, and issued in due form into the presence chamber—into the immediate presence of majesty. His heart palpitated: his dazzled eye caught a hasty glimpse of a tall magnificent figure standing before a throne. Advancing—scarce aware whether on his head or his heels—he reverently paid his homage—then rising, was promptly ushered out through a different door; with no distinct impression of anything that he had witnessed!—'twas all a dazzling blaze of glory—a dim vision of awe! Little was he aware, poor soul, that the king had required him to be pointed out upon his approach, having heard of his celebrity in society; and that he had had the distinguished honour of occasioning to majesty a very great effort to keep its countenance. It was not till after he had quitted the palace for some time, that he breathed freely again. Then he began to feel as if a vast change had been effected in him, by some mysterious and awful agency—that he was penetrated and pervaded, as it were, by the subtle essence of royalty—like one that had experienced the sudden, strange, thrilling, potent, influence of electricity. He imagined that now the stamp of greatness had been impressed upon him; that his pretensions had been ratified by the highest authority upon

earth. 'Twas as if wine had been poured into a stream, intoxicating the *tittle-bats* swimming about in it.

While Titmouse was making this splendid figure in the upper regions of society, and forming there every hour new and brilliant connections and associations—in a perfect whirl of pleasure from morning to night—he did not ungratefully manifest a total forgetfulness of the amiable persons with whom he had been so familiar, and from whom he had received so many good offices in his earlier days and humbler circumstances. Had it not, however—to give the devil his due—been for Gammon (who was ever beside him, like a mysterious pilot, secretly steering his little bark amidst the strange, splendid, but dangerous seas which it had now to navigate), I fear that, with Titmouse, it would have been—out of sight out of mind. But Gammon, ever watchful over the real interests of his charge, and also delighted to become the medium of conferring favours upon others, conveyed from time to time, to the interesting family of the Tag-rags, special marks of Mr. Titmouse's courtesy and gratitude. At one time, a haunch of *doe* venison would find its way to Mr. Tag-rag, to whom Gammon justly considered that the distinction between buck and doe was unknown; at another, a fine work-box and a beautifully bound Bible found its way to good Mrs. Tag-rag; and lastly, a gay guitar to Miss Tag-rag, who forthwith began twang-twang, tang-a-tang-tanging-it, from morning to night, thinking with ecstasy of its dear distinguished donor; who together with Mr. Gammon, had, some time afterwards, the unspeakable gratification, on occasion of their being invited to dine at Satin Lodge, of hearing her accompany herself with her beautiful instrument while singing the following exquisite composition, for both the words and air of which she had been indebted to her music-master, a youth with black moustaches, long dark hair parted on his head, shirt collars à-la-Byron, and eyes full of inspiration!

TO HIM I LOVE.

1.

Affettuosamente. Ah me! I feel the smart
Of Cupid's cruel dart
Quivering in my heart,
Heigho, ah! whew!

2.

Allegro. With him I love
Swiftly time would move;
With his cigar,
And my guitar,
We'd smoke and play
The livelong day,
Merrily, merrily!
Puff—puff—puff,
Tang-a tang, tang-a tang!

3.

Adagio, et con molto espressione. When he's not near me
O! of life I'm weary—
The world is dreary—
Mystic spirits of song,
Wreathed with cypress, come along
And hear me! hear me!

Teneramente.

Singing,
Heigho, heigho—
Tootle, tootle, too,
A-lackaday!

Such were the tender and melting strains which this fair creature (her voice a little reedy and squeaking, to be sure) poured into the sensitive ear of Titmouse; and such are the strains by means of which many and many a Miss Tag-rag has captivated many and many a Titmouse; so that sentimental compositions of this sort have become deservedly popular, and do honour to our musical and poetical character as a nation. I said that it was on the occasion of a dinner at Satin Lodge, that Mr. Titmouse and Mr. Gammon were favoured by hearing Miss Tag-rag's voice, accompanying her guitar; for when Mr. Tag-rag had sounded Mr. Gammon, and found that both he and Titmouse would be only too proud and happy to partake of his hospitality, they were invited. A very crack affair it was (though I have not time to describe it)—given on a more splendid scale than Mr. Tag-rag had ever ventured upon before. He brought a bottle of *champagne* all the way from town with his own hands, and kept it nice and cool in the kitchen cistern for three days beforehand; and there was fish, soup, roast mutton, and roast ducks, roast fowls, peas, cabbage, cauliflowers, potatoes, vegetable marrows; there was an apple-pie, a plum-pudding, custards, creams, jelly, and a man to wait, hired from the tavern at the corner of the hill. It had not occurred to them to provide themselves with champagne glasses, so they managed as well as they could with the common ones—all but Titmouse, who with a sort of fashionable recklessness, to show how little he thought of it, poured out his champagne into his tumbler, which he two-thirds filled, and drank it off at a draught, Mr. Tag-rag trying to disguise the inward spasm it occasioned him, by a grievous smile. He and Mrs. Tag-rag exchanged anxious looks; the whole of their sole bottle of champagne was gone already—almost as soon as it had been opened!

"I always drink champagne out of a tumbler; I do—'pon my life," said Titmouse carelessly; "it's a devilish deal more pleasant."

"Ye-e-s—of course it is, sir," said Mr. Tag-rag rather faintly. Shortly afterwards, Titmouse offered to take a glass of champagne with Miss Tag-rag—Her father's face flushed; and at length, with a bold effort, "Why, Mr. Titmouse," said he, trying desperately to look unconcerned—"the—the fact is, I never keep more than a dozen or so in my cellar—and most unfortunately I found this afternoon that six bottles had—burst—I assure you."

"'Pon my soul, sorry to hear it," quoth Titmouse; "must send you a dozen of my own—I always keep about fifty or a hundred dozen. Oh, I'll send you half-a-dozen!"

Tag-rag scarcely knew, for a moment, whether he felt pleased or mortified at this stroke of delicate generosity. Thus it was that Titmouse evinced a disposition to shower marks of his favour and attachment upon the Tag-rags, in obedience to the injunctions of Gammon, who assured him that it was of very great importance for him to secure the good graces of Mr. Tag-rag. So Mr. Titmouse now drove up to Satin Lodge in his cab, and then rode thither, followed by his stylish groom; and on one occasion, artful little scamp! happening to find no one at home but Miss Tag-rag, he nevertheless alighted, and stayed for nearly ten minutes, behaving precisely in the manner of an accepted suitor, aware that he might do so with impunity since there was no witness present; a little matter which had been suggested to him by Mr. Gammon. Poor Miss Tag-rag's cheek he kissed with every appearance of ardour, protesting that she was a monstrous lovely creature; and he left her in a state of delighted excitement, imagining herself the fated mistress of ten thousand a-year, and the blooming bride of the gay and fashionable Mr. Titmouse. When her excellent parents heard of what had that day occurred between Mr. Titmouse and their daughter, they also looked upon the thing as quite settled. In the meanwhile, the stream of prosperity flowed steadily in upon Mr. Tag-rag, his shop continuing crowded; his shopmen doubled in

number:—in fact, he at length actually received, instead of giving payment, for allowing young men to serve a short time in so celebrated an establishment, in order that they might learn the first-rate style of doing business, and when established on their own account, write up over their doors—"Timothy Tape, late from Tag-rag & Co., Oxford Street."

Determined to make hay while the sun shone, he resorted to several little devices for that purpose, such as a shirt front with frills in the shape of a capital "T," and of which, under the name of "*Titties*," he sold immense numbers amongst the inferior swells of London. At length it occurred to Gammon to suggest to Titmouse a mode of conferring upon his old friend and master a mark of permanent, public, and substantial distinction; and this was, the obtaining for him, through the Earl of Dreddlington, an appointment as one of the *royal tradesmen*—namely, draper and hosier to the King. When Mr. Tag-rag's disinterested and indefatigable benefactor, Gammon, called one day in Oxford Street, and calling him for a moment out of the bustle of his crowded shop, mentioned the honour which Mr. Titmouse was bent upon doing his utmost, at Mr. Gammon's instance, to procure for Mr. Tag-rag, that respectable person was quite at a loss for terms in which adequately to express his gratitude. Titmouse readily consented to name the thing to the great man, and urge it in the best way he could; and he performed his promise. The Earl listened to his application with an air of anxiety. "Sir," said he, "the world is acquainted with my reluctance to ask favours of those in office. When I was in office myself, I felt the inconvenience of such applications abundantly. Besides, the appointment you have named, happens to be one of considerable importance, and requiring great influence to procure it. Consider, sir, the immense number of tradesmen there are of every description, of whom drapers and hosiers (according to the last returns laid before Parliament, at the instance of my friend Lord Goose) are by far the most numerous. All of them are naturally ambitious of so high a distinction: yet, sir, observe, that there is only one king and one royal family to serve. My Lord Chamberlain is, I have no doubt, harassed by applicants for such honours as you have mentioned."

Hereat Titmouse grew startled at the unexpected magnitude of the favour he had applied for; and, declaring that he did not care a curse for Tag-rag, begged to withdraw his application. But the Earl, with a mighty fine air, interrupted him—"Sir, you are not in the least presuming upon your relationship with me, nor do I think you overrate the influence I may happen—in short, sir, I will make it my business to see my Lord Ko-Too this very day, and sound him upon the subject."

That same day an interview took place between the two distinguished noblemen, Lord Dreddlington and Lord Ko-too. Each approached the other upon stilts. After a display of the most delicate tact on the part of Lord Dreddlington, Lord Ko-too, who made a mighty piece of work of it, promised to consider the application.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WITHIN a day or two afterwards Mr. Tag-rag received a letter from the Lord Chamberlain's office, notifying that his Majesty had been graciously pleased to appoint him draper and hosier to his Majesty! It occasioned him feelings of tumultuous pride and pleasure, similar to those with which the Earl of Dreddlington would have received tidings of his long-coveted marquissate having been conferred upon him. He started off, within a quarter of an

hour after the receipt of the letter, to a carver and gilder a few doors off, and gave orders for the immediate preparation of a first-rate cast, gilded, of the royal arms; which, in about a week's time, might be seen, a truly resplendent object, dazzlingly conspicuous over the central door of Mr. Tag-rag's establishment, inspiring awe into the minds of passers-by, and envy into Mr. Tag-rag's neighbours and rivals. He immediately sent off letters of gratitude to Mr. Titmouse, and to "the Right Honourable, the Most Noble the Earl of Dreddlington;" to the latter personage, at the same time, forwarding a most splendid crimson satin flowered dressing-gown, as "an humble token of his gratitude for his lordship's mark of condescension."

Both the letter and the dressing-gown gave great satisfaction to the Earl's valet (than whom they never got any further), and who, having tried on the dressing-gown, forthwith sat down and wrote a very fine reply, in his lordship's name, to the note which had accompanied it, taking an opportunity to satisfy his conscience, by stating to the Earl the next morning that a Mr. Tag-rag had "*called*" to express his humble thanks for his lordship's goodness. He was, moreover, so well satisfied with this specimen of Mr. Tag-rag's articles, that he forthwith opened an account with him, and sent a very liberal order to start with. The same thing occurred with several of the subordinate functionaries at the palace; and—to let my reader, a little prematurely, however, into a secret—this was the extent of the additional custom which Mr. Tag-rag's appointment secured him; and, even for these supplies, I never heard of his getting paid. But it did wonders with him in the estimation of the world. 'Twas evident that he was in a fair way of becoming the head house in the trade. His appointment caused no little ferment in that nook of the city with which he was connected. The Worshipful Company of Squirt-makers elected him a member; and on a vacancy suddenly occurring in the ward to which he belonged, for he had a considerable shop in the city also, he was made a common council-man. Mr. Tag-rag soon made a great stir as a champion of civil and religious liberty. As for church and county rates, in particular, he demonstrated the gross injustice and absurdity of calling upon one who had no *personal* occasion for the use of a church, of a county bridge, a county jail, or a lunatic asylum, to be called upon to contribute to the support of them. A few speeches in this strain attracted so much attention to him, that several leading men in the ward (a very "liberal" one) intimated to him that he stood the best chance of succeeding to the honour of alderman on the next vacancy; and when he and Mrs. Tag-rag were alone together, he would start the subject of the expenses of the mayoralty with no little anxiety. He went to the chapel no longer on foot, but in a stylish sort of covered gig, with a kind of coal-scuttle-shaped box screwed on behind, into which was squeezed his footboy (who, by the way, had a thin stripe of crimson let into each leg of his trousers, on Mr. Tag-rag's appointment to an office under the crown); he was also a trifle later in arriving at the chapel than he had been accustomed to be. He had a crimson velvet cushion running along the front of his pew, and the bibles and hymn books were smartly gilded. He was presently advanced to the honoured post of chief deacon, and on one occasion, in the unexpected absence of the central luminary of the system, was asked to occupy the chair at a "great meeting" of the Society for the Promotion of Civil and Religious Discord; when he took the opportunity of declaring his opinion, which was enthusiastically cheered, that the principles of free trade ought to be applied to religion; and that the voluntary system was that which was designed by God to secure the free blessings of competition. As for Satin Lodge, he stuck two little wings to it; and had one of the portraits of Tittlebat Titmouse (as Tippetiwink) hung over his drawing-room mantelpiece, splendidly framed and glazed

Some little time after Tag-rag had obtained the royal appointment, which I have been so particular in recording, Gammon, *happening* to be passing his shop, stepped in, and observing Mr. Tag-rag, very cordially greeted him; and then, as if it had been a thought of the moment only, without taking him from the shop, intimated that he had been westward, engaged in completing the formal details of a rearrangement of the greater portion of Mr. Titmouse's estates, upon which that gentleman had recently determined, and the sight of Mr. Tag-rag's establishment had suggested to Mr. Gammon that possibly Mr. Tag-rag would feel gratified at being made a formal party to the transaction, as Mr. Gammon was sure that Mr. Titmouse would feel delighted at having associated with the Earl of Dreddlington and one or two other persons of distinction, in the meditated arrangement, the name of so early and sincere a friend as Mr. Tag-rag; "one who, moreover"—here Gammon paused, and gave a smile of inexpressible significance, "but it was not for *him* to hint his suspicions—"

"Sir—I—I—*will* you come into my room?" interrupted Tag-rag, rather eagerly, anxious to have a more definite indication of Mr. Gammon's opinion; but that gentleman, looking at his watch, pleaded want of time, and, suddenly shaking Mr. Tag-rag by the hand, moved towards the door.

"You were talking of signing, sir; have you got with you what you want signed! I'll sign anything—anything for Mr. Titmouse, only too proud—it's an honour to be any way connected with him!" Gammon, on hearing this, felt in his pockets, as if he supposed he should find there what he knew perfectly well had been lying ready, cut and dried, in his safe at Saffron Hill for months.

"I find I haven't got the little document with me," said he, carelessly; "I suppose it's lying about with other loose papers at the office, or may have been left at the Earl's"—[though Gammon's objects required him here to allude to the Earl of Dreddlington, I think it only fair to say that he had never been, for one instant in his life, in that great man's presence.]

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Gammon," said Tag-rag, considering—"Your office is at Saffron Hill? Well, I shall be passing your way to-morrow, on my way to my city establishment, about noon, and will look in and do all you wish."

"Could you arrange to meet the Earl there?—or, as his lordship's movements are—ah, ha!—not very—" "Should be most proud to meet his lordship, sir, to express my personal gratitude—" "Oh, the Earl never likes to be reminded, Mr. Tag-rag, of any little courtesy or kindness he may have conferred! But if you will be with us about twelve, we can wait a little while; and if his lordship should not be punctual, we must even let you sign first, ah, ha!—and explain it to his lordship on his arrival, for I know your time's very precious, Mr. Tag-rag! Gracious, Mr. Tag-rag! what a constant stream of customers you have! I heard it said, the other day, that you were rapidly absorbing all the leading business in your line in Oxford Street."

"You're very polite, Mr. Gammon! Certainly, I've no reason to complain. I always keep the best of everything, both here and in the city, and sell at the lowest prices, and spare no pains to please; and it's hard if—"

"Ah!—how do you do?" quoth Gammon, suddenly starting, and bowing to some one on the side of the way, whom he did *not* see. "Well, good-day, Mr. Tag-rag—good-day! To-morrow at twelve, by the way?"

"I'm yours to command, Mr. Gammon," replied Tag-rag; and so they parted. Just about twelve o'clock the next day, the latter, in a great bustle, saying he had fifty places to call at in the city, made his appearance at Saffron Hill.

"His lordship a'n't here, I suppose?" quoth he, after shaking hands with Mr. Quirk and Mr. Gammon. The latter gentleman pulled out his watch, and shrugging his shoulders, said with a smile, "No—we'll give him half-an-hour's grace."

"Half-an-hour, my dear sir!" exclaimed Tag-rag, "I couldn't stay so long, even for the high honour of meeting his lordship. I am a man of business, he isn't; first come first served, you know, eh? All fair that!" There were a good many recently engrossed parchments and writings scattered over the table, and from among them Gammon, after tossing them about for some time, at length drew out a sheet of foolscap. It was stamped, and there was writing upon the first and second pages.

"Now, gentlemen, quick's the word—time's precious!" said Tag-rag, taking up a pen, and dipping it into the inkstand. Gammon, with an unconcerned air, placed before him the document he had been looking for. "Ah, how well I know the signature? That flourish of his—a sort of boldness about it, a'n't there?" said Tag-rag, observing the signature of Titmouse immediately above the spot on which he was going to place his own; there being written in pencil, underneath, the word "Dreddlington" evidently for the intended signature of the Earl. "I'm between two good ones, at any rate, eh?" said Tag-rag. Gammon or Quirk said something about a "term to attend the inheritance"—"trustee of an outstanding term"—"legal estate vested in the trustees"—"too great power to be put in the hands of any but those of the highest honour."

"Stay!" quoth Gammon, ringing his little hand-bell—"nothing like regularity, even in trifles." He was answered by one of the clerks, a very dashing person—"We only wish you to witness a signature," said Gammon. "Now, we shall release you, Mr. Tag-rag, in a moment. Say, 'I deliver this as my act and deed'—putting your finger on the little wafer there."

So said and so did Mr. Tag-rag as he had been directed; the clerk wrote his name under the witnessing clause "Abominable Amminadab;" and from that moment Mr. Tag-rag had unconsciously acquired an interest in the future stability of Mr. Titmouse's fortunes, to the extent of some FORTY THOUSAND POUNDS.

"Now, gentlemen, you'll make my compliments to his lordship, and if he asks how I came to sign before him, explain the hurry I was in. Time and tide wait for no man. Good morning, gentlemen; good-morning; best regards to our friend, Mr. Titmouse." Gammon attended him to the door, cordially shaking him by the hand, and presently returned to the room he had just quitted, where he found Mr. Quirk holding in his hand the document just signed by Tag-rag; which was, in fact, a joint and several bond, conditioned in a penalty of forty thousand pounds, for the due repayment, by Titmouse, of twenty thousand pounds, and interest at five per cent., about to be advanced to him on mortgage of a portion of the Yatton property. Gammon, sitting down, gently took the instrument from Mr. Quirk, and with a bit of India-rubber calmly effaced the pencilled signature of "Dreddlington."

"You're a d——d clever fellow, Gammon!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk presently, with a sort of sigh, and after, as it were, holding his breath for some time. Gammon made no reply. His face was slightly pale, and wore an anxious expression. "It will do *now*," continued Mr. Quirk, rubbing his hands, and with a gleeful expression of countenance. "That remains to be seen," replied Gammon in a low tone. "Eh? What? Does anything occur—eh? By Jove, no screw loose I hope?" "No—but we're in *very deep water* now, Mr. Quirk—" "Well—devil only cares, so long as *you* keep a sharp look-out, Gammon. I'll trust the helm to you."

As Gammon did not seem in a talkative mood, Quirk shortly afterwards left him.

Now, though Mr. Tag-rag is no favourite of mine, I begin to feel a good deal of anxiety on his behalf. I wish he had not been in so vast a "hurry," in a matter which required such grave deliberation, as "signing, sealing, and delivering." When a man is called on to go through so serious a ceremony

it would be well if he could be apprised of the significance of the formula—*"I deliver this as my act and deed."*

Possibly some one now reading these pages hath had most dismal experience in the matter above mentioned; and I hope that such dismal experience a due reflection will avert from many a reader. As for Tag-rag, it may turn out that our fears for him are groundless: nevertheless *one hates to see men do important things in a hurry*:—and, as we shall lose sight of Mr. Tag-rag for some time, there can be no harm in wishing him well out of what he has just done.

"If 'twere done when 'tis done—
Then 'twere well 'twere done *quickly*!"—

and not otherwise.

The London season was now advancing towards its close. Fine ladies were getting sated and exhausted with operas, concerts, balls, routs, soirées, assemblies, bazaars, fêtes, and the Park. Their lords were getting tired of their clubs during the day, and hurried dinners, late hours, foul air, and long speeches, at the two Houses; where, however, they might doze away the time, they could seldom get the luxury of a downright nap for more than an hour or two together—always waking, and fancying themselves in the tower of Babel, and that it was on fire, so strange and startling were the lights and the hubbub! The very whippers-in were looking jaded and done—each being like a Smithfield drover's dog on a Monday night, that at length can neither bark nor bite in return for a kick or a blow; and, hoarse and wearied, falls asleep on his way home. Where the Earl of Dreddlington and Lady Cecilia were to pass their autumn, was a question which they were beginning to discuss rather anxiously. Any one glancing over their flourished list of residences in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, which were paraded in the Peerages and Court Guides, would have supposed that they had an ample choice before them: but the reader of this history knows better. The mortifying explanation—mortifying to the poor Earl—having been once given by me, I shall not again do so. Suffice it to say, that Poppleton Hall, Hertfordshire, had its disadvantages; there they must keep up a full establishment, and receive county company and other visitors—owing, as they did, much hospitality. 'Twas expensive work, also, at the watering-places; and expensive and also troublesome to go abroad at the Earl's advanced period of life. Pensively ruminating on these matters one evening, they were interrupted by a servant bringing in a note, which proved to be from Titmouse—inviting them, in terms of profound courtesy and great cordiality, to honour Yatton, by making a stay there during as great a portion of the autumn as they could not better occupy. Mr. Titmouse frankly added, that he could not avoid acknowledging some little degree of selfishness in giving the invitation—namely, in expressing a hope that the Earl's presence would afford him, if so disposed, an opportunity of introducing him—Titmouse—to any of the leading members of the county who might be honoured by the Earl's acquaintance; that, situated as Titmouse was, he felt an increasing anxiety on that point. He added, that he trusted the Earl and Lady Cecilia would consider Yatton, while they were there, as in all respects their own residence, and, that he Titmouse, would spare no exertion to render their stay as agreeable as possible. The humble appeal of Titmouse prevailed with his great kinsman, who, on the next day, sent him a letter, saying that his lordship fully recognized the claims which Mr. Titmouse had upon him as the head of the family, and that his lordship should feel very glad in availing himself of the opportunity which offered itself, of placing Mr. Titmouse on a proper footing of intercourse with the people of the county. That, for this purpose, his lordship should decline any invitations they might receive to pass their

autumn elsewhere, etc., etc., etc. In plain English, they jumped at the invitation. It had emanated originally from Gammon, who, from motives of his own, had suggested it to Titmouse, bade him act upon it, and drew up the letter conveying it. I say, from motives of his own, Gammon was bent upon becoming personally acquainted with the Earl, and fixing himself, if possible, thoroughly in his lordship's confidence. He had contrived to ascertain from Titmouse, without that gentleman being, however, aware of it, that the few occasions on which his (Gammon's) name had been mentioned by the Earl, it had been accompanied by slighting expressions—by indications of dislike and suspicion. Give him, however, thought he, but the opportunity, and he could very soon change the nature of the Earl's feelings towards him. As soon, therefore as the Earl's acceptance of the invitation had been communicated to Gammon, he resolved to be one of the guests at Yatton during the time of the Earl's stay—a step, into the propriety of which he easily brought Mr. Quirk to enter, but which he did not, for the present, communicate to Titmouse, lest he should, by prematurely disclosing it to the Earl, raise an obstacle, arising out of an objection on the part of his lordship, who, if he but found Gammon actually *there*, must submit to the infliction with what grace he might. In due time it was notified on the part of the Earl, by his man of business, to Mr. Titmouse (who had gone down to Yatton), through *his* man of business, that the Earl, and a formidable portion of his establishment, would make their appearance at Yatton by a named day. The Earl had chosen to extend the invitation to Miss Macspleuchan, and also to as many attendants as he thought fit to take with him, instead of letting them consume their board wages in entire idleness in town or at Poppleton. Heavens! what accommodation was required, for the Earl, for the Lady Cecilia, each of their personal attendants, Miss Macspleuchan, and five servants! Then there were two other guests invited, in order to form company and amusement for the Earl—the Marquis Gants-Jaunes de Millefleurs, and a Mr. Tuft. Accommodation must be had for these; and, to secure it, Mr. Titmouse and Mr. Gammon were driven to almost the extremities of the house. Four servants, in a sort of baggage-waggon, preceded the arrival of the Earl and Lady Cecilia by a day or two, in order to “arrange everything;” and, somehow or another, one of the first things that was done with this view, was to install his lordship's chief servants in the quarters of Mr. Titmouse's servants, who, it was suggested, should endeavour to make themselves as comfortable as they could in some little unfurnished rooms over the stables! And, in a word, before Mr. Titmouse's grand guests had been at the Hall four-and-twenty hours, there was established there the same freezing state and solemn ceremony which prevailed in the Earl's own establishment. Down came at length, thundering through the village, the Earl's dusty travelling-carriage and four; himself Lady Cecilia, and Miss Macspleuchan within, his valet and Lady Cecilia's maid behind: presently it wound round the park road, crashing and flashing through the gravel, and rattling under the old gateway, and at length stood before the Hall door—the reeking horses pulled up with a sudden jerk, which almost threw them all upon their haunches. Mr. Titmouse was in readiness to receive his distinguished visitors; the carriage-door was opened—down went the steps—and in a few moments' time the proud old Earl of Dreddlington and his proud daughter, having entered the Hall, had become the guests of its flustered and ambitious little proprietor.

While all the guests are occupied in their dressing-rooms, recovering themselves from the cramp and fatigue of a long journey, and are preparing to make their appearance at dinner, let me take the opportunity to give you a sketch of the only one of the guests to whom you are at present a stranger: I mean Mr. Tuft—Mr. VENOM TUFT.

Ofth hath an inexperienced mushroom-hunter, deceived at a distance, run up to gather what seemed to be a fine cluster of mushrooms, growing under the shade of a stately tree, but which, on stooping down to gather them, he discovers with disappointment and disgust to be no mushrooms at all, but vile, unwholesome—even poisonous funguses, which, to prevent their similarly deluding others, he kicks up and crushes under foot. And is not this a type of what often happens in society? Under the “cold shade of aristocracy,” how often is to be met with—THE SYCOPHANT?—Mr. Venom Tuft was one of them. His character was written on his face. Disagreeable to look at—though *he* thought far otherwise—he yet contrived to make himself pleasant to be listened to, by the languid and ennuyéed fashionable. He spoke ever—

“In a *toady’s* key,
With bated breath and whispering humbleness.”

His person was at once effeminate and coarse; his gesture and address were cringing—there was an intolerable calmness and gentleness about him at all times, but especially while labouring in his vocation. He had the art of administering flattery by a look only, deferential and insinuating—as well as by words. He had always at command a copious store of gossip, highly seasoned with scandal. Clever toadies are generally bitter ones. With sense enough to perceive, but not spirit enough to abandon their odious propensities, they are aware of the ignominious spectacle they exhibit before the eyes of men of the least degree of independence and discernment, and whose open contempt they have not power or manliness enough to resent. Then their smothered rage takes an inward turn; it tends to, and centres in the tongue, from which it falls in drops of scalding virus; and thus it is, that the functions of sycophant and slanderer are so often found united in the same miserable individual. Mr. Tuft was not an every-day toady. Being a clever man, it occurred to him as calculated infinitely to enhance the value of his attentions, if he could get them to be regarded as those of a man of some ability and reputation. So reasonable a wish, as thus to rise to eminence in the calling in life to which he had devoted himself—viz., toadyism—stimulated him to considerable exertion, which was in time rewarded by a measure of success; for he began to be looked on as *something* of a literary man. Then he would spend his mornings in reading up, in those quarters whence he might cull materials for display in society at a later period of the day; when he would watch his opportunity, or, if none presented itself, make one, by diverting the current of conversation into the channel on which was the gay and varied bordering of his very recent acquisitions. All his knowledge was of this gossiping character. Carefully, however, as he managed matters, he was soon found out by *men*, and compelled to betake himself, with tenfold ardour, to the women, with whom he lasted a little longer. *They* considered him a great literary man; for he could quote and criticize a great deal of poetry, and a good many novels. He could show that what everybody else admired was full of faults; what all condemned was admirable: so that the fair creatures were forced to distrust their own judgment in proportion as they deferred to his. He would allow no one to be entitled to the praise of literary excellence except individuals of rank, and one or two men of established literary reputation, who had not thought it worth their while to repel his obsequious advances, or convenient not to do so. Then he would polish the poetry of fine ladies, touch up their little tales, and secure their insertion in fashionable periodicals. On these accounts, and of his piquant tittle-tattle, no *soirée* or *conversazione* was complete without him, any more than without tea, coffee, ice, or lemonade. All

toadies hate one another ; but his brethren both hated and feared Mr. Tuft ; for he was not only so successful himself, but possessed and used such engines for *depressing them*. Mr. Tuft had hoped to succeed in being popped in by one of his patrons for a snug little Whig borough (for Tuft happened to be a Whig—though, for that matter, he might have been, more advantageously, a Tory) ; but the great man got tired of him, and turned him off, though the ladies of the family still secured him access to the dinner-table. He did not, however, make a very grateful return for such good-natured condescensions. Ugly and ungainly as he was, he yet imagined himself possessed of personal attractions for the ladies, and converted their innocent and unsuspecting familiarities, which had emanated from those confident in their purity and their greatness, into tokens of the ascendancy he had gained over them ; and of which, with equal cruelty, folly, and presumption, he would afterwards boast pretty freely. Till this came, however, to be suspected and discovered, Mr. Tuft visited a good many leading houses in the town, and spent no inconsiderable portion of each autumn at some one or other of the country mansions of his patrons—from whose “castles,” “halls,” “abbeys,” “prieories,” and “seats,” he took great pride in dating his letters to his friends. I must not forget to mention that he kept a book, very gorgeously bound and embellished, with silver-gilt clasps, and bearing on the back the words—“Book of Autographs ;” but I should have written it—“Trophies of Toadyism.” This book contained autograph notes of the leading nobility, addressed familiarly to himself, thus :—

“The Duke of Walworth presents his compliments to Mr. Tuft, and feels particularly obliged by,” etc.

“The Duchess of Diamond hopes Mr. Tuft will not forget to bring with him this evening,” etc.

“The Marquis of M—— has the honour to assure Mr. Tuft that,” etc.

“Dear Mr. Tuft,

“Why were you not at —— House last night ? We were dreadfully dull without you ! X—— just as stupid as you always say he *is*.”

[This was from a very pretty and fashionable countess, whose initials it bore.]

“If Mr. Tuft is dead, Lady Dulcimer requests to be informed when his funeral will take place, as she, together with a host of mourners, intends to show him a last mark of respect.”

“Dear Mr. Tuft,

“The poodle you brought me has got the mange, or some horrid complaint or other, which is making all his hair fall off. Do come and tell me what is to be done. Where can I send the sweet suffering angel ?—Yours,

“ARABELLA D——.”

[This was from the eldest and loveliest daughter of a very great duke.]

“The Lord Chancellor presents his compliments, and begs to acknowledge the receipt of Mr. Venom Tuft’s obliging present of his little ‘*Essay on Greatness*.’”

These are samples, taken at random, of the contents of Mr. Tuft’s book of autographs, evidencing abundantly the satisfactory terms of intimacy upon which he lived with the great ; and it was ecstasy to him, to see this glittering record of his triumphs glanced over by the envious admiring eyes of those in his own station in society. How he delighted to be asked about the sayings and doings of the exclusive circles ! How confidentially would he intimate the desperate condition of a sick peer—an expected *éclaircissement* of some fashionable folly and crime—or a move to be made in the House that evening !—poor Tuft little suspecting (lying so snug in his shell of self-

conceit) how frequently he fell, on these occasions, among the Philistines—and was, unconsciously to himself, being trotted out by a calm sarcastic hypocrite, for the amusement of the standers-by, just as a little monkey is poked with a stick to get up and exhibit himself and his tricks. Such was Mr. Tuft, a great friend and admirer of “the Marquis,” through whose influence he had procured the invitation from Titmouse, in virtue of which he was now dressing in a nice little room at the back of the Hall, overlooking the stables; being bent upon improving his already tolerably familiar acquaintance with the Earl of Dreddlington and Lady Cecilia, and also extracting from the man whose hospitality he was enjoying, materials for merriment among his great friends against the next season.

When the party had collected in the drawing-room in readiness for dinner, you might have seen Mr. Tuft in earnestly respectful conversation with the Lady Cecilia; Mr. Gammon standing talking to Miss Macspleuchan, with an air of courteous ease and frankness—having observed her sitting neglected by everybody; the Earl conversing now with the Marquis, then with Titmouse, and anon with Tuft, with whom he appeared to be particularly pleased. Happening at length to be standing near Gammon—a calm, gentlemanlike person, of whom he knew nothing, nor suspected that his keen eye had taken in his lordship's true character and capacity at a glance; nor that he would, in a few hours' time, acquire as complete a mastery over his said lordship, as ever the present famous *hippodamist* at Windsor, by touching a nerve in the mouth of a horse, reduces him to helpless docility and submission—the Earl and he fell into casual conversation for a moment or two. The air of deference with which Gammon received the slight advances of the great man, was exquisite and indescribable. It gave him clearly to understand that his lofty pretensions were known to, and profoundly appreciated by, the individual he was addressing. Gammon said but little; that little, however, how significant and decisive! He knew that the Earl would presently inquire of Titmouse who the unknown visitor was; and that on being told in the conceited and probably disparaging manner which Gammon knew Titmouse would adopt, if he supposed it would please the Earl, that “it was only Mr. Gammon, one of his solicitors,” he would sink at once and for ever beneath the notice of the Earl. He resolved therefore to anticipate—to contrive that it should ooze out easily and advantageously from himself, so that he could see the effect it had upon the Earl, and regulate his movements accordingly. Gammon sat down before the fortress of the Earl's pride, resolved that, for all that it appeared so inaccessible and impregnable, it should fall, however his skill and patience might be taxed in the siege. Till he had cast his piercing eye upon the Earl, Gammon had felt a little of the nervousness which one may imagine would be experienced by Van Amburgh, who, on being called into the presence of majesty to give a specimen of his skill upon an animal concealed from him—of whose name and qualities he was ignorant—should summon all his terrors into his eye, and string his muscles to their highest tension; and, on the door being opened, turn with smiling scorn—if not indignation—from a sucking pig, a calf, an ass, or a chicken. Something similar were the feelings experienced by Gammon, as soon as he had scanned the countenance and figure of the Earl of Dreddlington. He quickly perceived that the dash of awe which he had thrown into his manner was producing its due effect upon that most magnificent simpleton. Watching his opportunity, he gently introduced the topic of the recent change of ownership which Yatton had undergone; and in speaking of the manner in which Mr. Titmouse had borne his sudden prosperity—“Yes, my lord,” continued Gammon, with apparent carelessness, “I recollect making some such observation to him, and he replied, ‘very true, *Mr. Gammon*’”—Gammon finished his sentence calmly; but he perceived that the Earl had withdrawn himself

into his earldom. He had given a very slight start; a little colour had mounted into his cheek; a sensible hauteur had been resumed, and by the time that Gammon had done speaking, the space between them had been—as Lord Dreddlington imagined, unobservedly—increased by two or three inches. Gammon was a *man*—an able and a proud man—and he felt galled; but, “let it pass,” he presently reflected—“let it pass, you pompous old idiot; I will one day repay it with interest.” The Earl separated from him, Gammon regarding him as a gaudy craft sheering off for a while, but doomed to be soon sunk. Mr. Tuft (who was the son of a respectable retired tobacconist), having ascertained that Gammon was only Mr. Titmouse’s attorney, conducted himself for a while as though there were no such person in the room; but being a quick observer, and catching once or twice the faint sarcastic smile with which Gammon’s eye was settled on him, he experienced a very galling and uneasy consciousness of his presence. The Marquis’s superior tact and perception of character led him to treat Gammon very differently—with a deference and anxiety to please him, which Gammon understood thoroughly—in fact he and the Marquis had many qualities in common, but Gammon was the man of *power*. During dinner he sat beside Miss Macspleuchan, and was almost the only person who spoke to her—in fact, he said but little to any one else. He took wine with Titmouse with a marked but guarded air of *confidence*. The Marquis took wine with Gammon with an air of studied courtesy. The Earl’s attention was almost entirely engrossed by Mr. Tuft, who sat next to him, chattering in his ear like a little magpie perched upon his shoulder. The Marquis sat next to the Lady Cecilia; for whose amusement, as far as his cautious tact would allow him, he from time to time drew out their little host. At length in answer to a question by the Marquis, the Earl let fall some pompous observation, which the Marquis, who was getting very tired of the vapid monotony which pervaded the table, ventured to differ from pretty decisively. Tuft instantly sided with the Earl, and spoke with infinite fluency for some minutes: Gammon saw in a moment that he was an absurd pretender; and watching his opportunity, for the first time that he had interchanged a syllable with him, with one word exposing a palpable historical blunder of poor Tuft’s, overthrew him as completely as a bullet from a crossbow dislodges a tomtit from the wall on which he is hopping about, unconscious of his danger. “That’s a thing that there could be no mistake about whatever.

“That’s a *settler*, Tuft,” said the Marquis, after a pause; Tuft reddened violently, and gulped down a glass of wine; and presently, with the slightly staggered Earl, became a silent listener to the discussion into which the Marquis and Gammon had entered. Obtuse as was the Earl, Gammon contrived to let him see how effectually he was supporting his lordships’ opinion, which Mr. Tuft had so ridiculously failed in. The Marquis got slightly the worst of the encounter with Gammon, whose object he saw, and whose tact he admired; and with much judgment permitted Gammon to appear to the Earl as his successful defender, in order that he might himself make a friend of Gammon. Moreover, he was not at all annoyed at witnessing the complete and unexpected discomfiture of poor Tuft, whom, for all his intimacy with that gentleman, the Marquis thoroughly despised.

However it might possibly be that his grand guests enjoyed themselves, it was far otherwise with Mr. Titmouse; who, being compelled to keep sober, was quite miserable. None of those around him were drinking men;—and the consequence was, that he would retire early to his bedroom, and amuse himself with brandy and water, and cigars, while his guests amused themselves with cards, billiards, or otherwise, as best they might. He did, indeed, “stand like a cipher in the great account;” instead of feeling himself the Earl of Dreddlington’s host, he felt himself as one of his lordship’s guests, struggling

in vain against the freezing state and etiquette which the Earl carried with him wherever he went, like a sort of atmosphere. In this extremity he secretly clung to Gammon, and reposed upon his powerful support and sympathy more implicitly than ever he had done before. As the shooting season had commenced, and game was plentiful at Yatton, the Marquis and Tuft found full occupation during the day, as occasionally did Mr. Gammon. Mr. Titmouse once accompanied them; but having contrived once or twice very nearly to blow his own hand off, and also to blow out the eyes of the Marquis, they intimated that he had better go out alone for the future—as he did once or twice, but soon got tired of such solitary sport. Besides—hares, pheasants, partridges—old and young, cock or hen—’twas all one—none of them seemed to care one straw for him or his gun, let him pop and blaze away as loud and as long, as near or as far off, as he liked. The only thing he hit—and that plump—was one of his unfortunate dogs, which he killed on the spot; and then coming up with it, stamped upon the poor creature’s bleeding carcass, saying with a furious oath—“Why didn’t you keep out of the way, you brute?”

The Earl was really anxious to perform his promise of introducing, or procuring Titmouse to be introduced, to the leading nobility and gentry of the county; but it proved a more difficult task than his lordship had anticipated—for Titmouse’s early doings at Yatton had not yet been forgotten; some of the haughty Whig gentry joined with their Tory neighbours in manifesting their open contempt for one who could so disgrace the name and station to which he had been elevated in the county; and the Earl had to encounter one or two somewhat mortifying rebuffs. There were some, however, whom mere political considerations—some whom deference for the Earl’s rank, and unwillingness to hurt his feelings, and others from considerations of political interest—induced to receive the new Squire of Yatton on a footing of formal intimacy and equality; so that his lordship’s numerous drives were not entirely useless. The whole party at the Hall attended the Earl to church on the Sundays—entirely filling the Squire’s pew and the adjoining one; their decorous conduct presenting a very edifying spectacle to the humble congregation, and suggesting a striking contrast between the present and the former visitors at the Hall. Worthy Dr. Tatham was asked several times to dinner, at the Earl’s instance, who treated him on such occasions with great though stately courtesy. The only persons with whom the little Doctor felt at his ease, were Mr. Gammon and Miss Macspleuchan, who treated him with the utmost cordiality and respect. What became during the day of the two ladies, I hardly know. There was no instrument at Yatton: bagatelle board, and novels from a circulating library at York, frequent rides and drives through the grounds and about the country, and occasional visits to and from one or two families with whom Lady Cecilia had a town acquaintance, occupied their day; and in the evening, a rubber at whist, or *écarté*, with the Earl—sometimes, too, with the Marquis and Mr. Tuft, both of whom lost no opportunity of paying marked attention to Lady Cecilia, with a view of dissipating as far as possible the inevitable *ennui* of her situation—would while away the short evenings, very early hours being now kept at the Hall. ’Twas wonderful that two such men as the Marquis and Mr. Tuft could stay so long as they did at so very dull a place, and with such dull people. Inwardly, they both voted the Earl an insufferable old twaddler; his daughter a piece of languid insipidity; and one would have thought it daily more irksome for them to keep up their courtly attentions. They had, however, as may presently be seen, their objects in view.

As Gammon, a little to the Earl’s surprise, continued apparently a permanent guest at the Hall, where he seemed ever engaged in superintending and

getting into order the important affairs of Mr. Titmouse, it could hardly be but that he and the Earl should be occasionally thrown together; for as the Earl did not shoot, and never read books, even had there been any to read, he had little to do, when not engaged upon the expeditions I have alluded to, but saunter about the house and grounds, and enter into conversation with almost anyone he met. The assistance which Gammon had rendered the Earl on the occasion of their first meeting at dinner, had not been forgotten by his lordship, but had served to take off the edge from his preconceived contemptuous dislike for him. Gammon steadily kept in the back ground, resolved that all advances should come from the Earl. When, once or twice, his lordship inquired, with what Gammon saw to be only an affected carelessness, into the state of Mr. Titmouse's affairs, Mr. Gammon evinced a courteous readiness to give him *general* information; but with an evident caution and anxiety, not unduly to expose, even to the Earl, Mr. Titmouse's distinguished kinsman, the state of his property. He would, however, disclose sufficient to satisfy the Earl of Mr. Gammon's zeal and ability on behalf of Mr. Titmouse's interests, his consummate qualifications as a man of business; and from time to time perceived that his display was not lost upon the Earl. Mr. Gammon's anxiety, in particular, to prevent the borough of Yatton from being a second time wrested out of the hands of its proprietor, and returning, by a corrupt and profligate arrangement with Ministers, a Tory to Parliament, gave the Earl peculiar satisfaction. He was led into a long conversation with Mr. Gammon upon political matters; and, at its close, was greatly struck with the soundness of his views, the strength of his Liberal principles, and the vigour and acuteness with which he had throughout agreed with everything the Earl had said, and fortified every position he had taken; evincing, at the same time, a profound appreciation of his lordship's luminous exposition of political principles. The Earl was forced to own to himself, that he had never before met with a man of Mr. Gammon's strength of intellect, whose views and opinions had so intimately and entirely coincided—were, indeed, identical with his own. Nor was it only when they were alone together, that Gammon, would thus sit at the feet of Gamaliel: he was not ashamed to do so openly at the dinner-table; but ah! how delicately and dexterously did he conceal from the spectators the game he was playing—more difficult to do so though it daily became—because the more willing Gammon was to receive, the more eager the Earl was to communicate instruction! If, on any of these occasions, oppressed by the multifariousness of his knowledge, and its sudden overpowering confluence, he would pause in the midst of a series of half-formed sentences, Gammon would be at hand, to glide in easily and finish what the Earl had begun, out of the Earl's own ample materials, of which Gammon had caught a glimpse, and only worked out of the Earl's own, somewhat numerous, half-formed illustrations. The Marquis and Mr. Tuft began, however, at length to feel a little impatient at observing the way Gammon was making with the Earl; but of what use was it for them to interfere? Gammon was an exceedingly awkward person to meddle with; for, having once got fair play, by gaining the Earl's ear, his accuracy, readiness, extent of information upon political topics, and admirable temper, told very powerfully against his two opponents, who at length interfered less and less with him; the Marquis only *feeling* pique, but Tuft also *showing* it. Had it been otherwise, indeed, with the latter gentleman, it would have been odd; for Gammon seemed to feel a peculiar pleasure in demolishing him. The Marquis, however, once resolved to show Gammon how distinctly he perceived his plan of operations, by waiting till he had accompanied the poor Earl to a climax of absurdity; and then, with his eye on Gammon, bursting into laughter. Seldom had Gammon been more ruffled than by that well-timed laugh; for he felt *found out*!

When the Earl and he were alone, he would listen with lively interest, over and over again, to the Earl's accounts of what he had intended to do, had he only continued in office, in the important department over which he had presided, viz., the Board of Green Cloth; and more than once put his lordship into a sort of flutter of excitement, by hinting at rumours which, he said, were rife—that, in the event of a change of ministers, which was looked for, his lordship was to be President of the Council. "Sir," the Earl would say, "I should not shrink from the performance of my duty to my sovereign, to whatever post he might be pleased to call me. The one you mention, sir, has its peculiar difficulties; and if I know anything of myself, sir, it is one for which—I should say—I am peculiarly qualified. Sir, the duty of presiding over the deliberations of powerful minds, requires signal discretion and dignity, because, in short, especially in affairs of state—Do you comprehend me, Mr. Gammon?"

"I understand your lordship to say, that where the occasion is one of such magnitude, and the disturbing forces are upon so vast a scale, to moderate and guide conflicting interests and opinions——"

"Sir, it is so; *tantas componere lites, hic labor, hoc opus*," interrupted the Earl, with a desperate attempt to fish up a fragment or two of his early scholarship; and his features wore for a moment a solemn commanding expression, which satisfied Gammon of the sway which his lordship would have had when presiding at the council-board. Gammon would also occasionally introduce the subject of heraldry, asking questions concerning that science, and also concerning the genealogies of leading members of the peerage, with which he safely presumed that the Earl would be, as also he proved, perfectly familiar; and his lordship would go on for an hour at once upon these interesting and vividly exciting subjects.

Shortly after luncheon one day, of which only Gammon, the Earl, and the two ladies, were in the Hall to partake, Mr. Gammon had occasion to enter the drawing-room, where he found the Earl sitting upon the sofa, with his massive gold spectacles on, leaning over the table, engaged in the perusal of a portion of a work then in course of periodical publication, which had only that day been delivered at the Hall. The Earl asked Gammon if he had seen it, and was answered in the negative.

"Sir," said the Earl, rising and removing his glasses, "it is a remarkably interesting publication, showing considerable knowledge of a very difficult and all-important subject, and one, in respect of which the lower orders of the people—nay, I lament to be obliged to add, the great bulk of the middle classes also, are woefully deficient—I mean heraldry, and the history of the origin, progress, and present state of the families of the old nobility and gentry of this country." The work which had been so fortunate as thus to meet with the approbation of the Earl, was the last monthly number of a History of the County of York, and of which work, as yet, only thirty-eight seven-and-sixpenny quarto numbers had made their appearance. 'Twas an admirable and instructive work, every number of which had contained a glorification of some different Yorkshire family. The discriminating patronage of Mr. Titmouse for this inestimable performance, had been secured by a most obsequious letter from the learned editor—but more especially by a device of his in the last number, which it would have been strange indeed if it could have failed to catch the eye, and interest the feelings, of the new aristocratical owner of Yatton. Opposite to an engraving of the Hall, was placed a magnificent genealogical tree, surmounted by a many-quartered shield of armorial bearings, both of which purported to be an accurate record of the ancestral glories of the house of "Titmouse of Yatton!" A minute investigation might indeed have detected that the recent flight of *Titmice*,

which were perched on the lower branches of this imposing pedigree, bore nearly as small a proportion to the long array of chivalrous Drelincourts and Dreddlingtons which constituted the massive trunk, as did the paternal coat* (to which the profound research and ingenuity of Gorgeous Tintack, the — king-at-arms, had succeeded in demonstrating the inalienable right of Tittlebat) to the interminable series of quarterings, derived from the same source, which occupied the remainder of the escutcheon. At these mysteriously significant symbols, however, Mr. Titmouse, though quite ready to believe that they indicated some just cause or other of family pride, had looked with the same appreciating intelligence which you may fancy you see a chicken displaying, while hesitatingly clapping its foot upon, and quaintly cocking its eye at, a slip of paper lying in a yard, covered over with algebraic characters and calculations. Far otherwise, however, was it with the Earl, in whose eyes the complex and recondite character of the production infinitely enhanced its value, and struck in his bosom several deep chords of genealogical feeling, as he proceeded, in answer to various anxious inquiries of Gammon, to give him a very full and minute account of the unrivalled splendour and antiquity of his lordship's ancestry. Now Gammon—while prosecuting the researches which had preceded the elevation of Mr. Titmouse to that rank and fortune of which the united voice of the fashionable world had now pronounced him so eminently worthy—had made himself pretty well acquainted with the previous history and connections of that ancient and illustrious house, of which the Earl of Dreddlington was the head; and his familiarity with this topic, though it did not *surprise* the Earl, because he conceived it to be every one's duty to acquaint himself with such momentous matters, rapidly raised him in the good opinion of the Earl, to whom, at length, it occurred to view him in quite a new light; viz., as the chosen instrument by whose means (under Providence) the perverse and self-willed Aubrey had been righteously cast down from that high place which his rebellious opposition to the wishes and political views of his liege lord, had rendered him unworthy to occupy, while a more loyal branch had been raised from obscurity to his forfeited rank and estates. In fact, the Earl began to look upon Gammon as one whose just regards for his lordship's transcendent position in the aristocracy of England, had led him even to anticipate his lordship's possible wishes; and proceeded accordingly to rivet this spontaneous allegiance, by discoursing with the most condescending affability on the successive noble and princely alliances which had, during a long series of generations, refined the ancient blood of the Drelincourts into the sort of super-sublimated ichor which at present flowed in his own veins. Mr. Gammon marked the progress of the Earl's feelings with the greatest interest, perceiving the increasing extent to which respect for him—Gammon—was mingling with his lordship's sublime self-satisfaction; and, watching his opportunity, struck a spark into the dry tinder of his vain imagination, blew it gently—and saw that it caught, and spread. Confident in his knowledge of the state of the Earl's feelings, and that his lordship had reached the highest point of credulity, Gammon intimated in a hesitating but highly significant manner, his impression that the recent failure in the male line of the princely house of Hoch-Stiffelhausen Narrenstein Dummleinberg had placed his lordship, in right of the marriage of one of his ancestors, during the Thirty Years' War, with a princess of that august line, in a situation to

* Per bend Ermine and Pean, two lions rampant combatant, counterchanged, armed and langued Gules; surmounted by three bendlets undee Argent, on each three fleurs-de-lis Azure; on a chief Or, three TITMOUSE volant proper; all within a bordure gobonated Argent and Sable.

CREST.—On a cap of maintenance a Titmouse proper, ducally gorged Or, holding in his beak a woodlouse embowed Azure. Motto—"Je le tiens."

claim, if such were his lordship's pleasure, the dormant honours and sovereign rank attached to the possession of that important principality. The Earl appeared for a few moments transfixed with awe. The bare possibility of such an event seemed too much for him to realize; but when further conversation with Gammon had familiarized his lordship with the notion, his mind's eye glanced to his old rival, the Earl of Fitz-Walter: what would *he* say to all this? How would his little honours pale beside the splendours of his Serene Highness the Prince of Hoch-Stiffelhausen Narrenstein Dummleinberg! He was not sorry when Mr. Gammon soon afterwards left him to follow out unrestrainedly the swelling current of his thoughts, and yield himself up to the transporting ecstasies of anticipated sovereignty. To such a pitch did his excitement carry him, that he might shortly afterwards have been seen walking up and down the Elm Avenue, with the feelings and the air of an old *King*.

Not satisfied, however, with the success of his daring experiment upon the credulity and inflammable imagination of an aspiring old nobleman—whom his suggestion had set upon instituting extensive inquiries into the position of his family with reference to the foreign alliances which it had formed in times past, and of which so dazzling an incident might really be in existence—it occurred to Mr. Gammon, on another occasion of his being left alone with the Earl, and who, he saw, was growing manifestly more pleased with the frequent recurrence of them, to sink a shaft into a new mine. He, therefore, on mere speculation, introduced, as a subject of casual conversation, the imprudence of persons of rank and large fortune devolving the management of their pecuniary affairs so entirely upon others—and thus leaving themselves exposed to all the serious consequences of employing incompetent, indolent, or mercenary agents. Mr. Gammon proceeded to observe that he had recently known an instance of a distinguished nobleman (whose name he for very obvious reasons suppressed), who, having occasion to raise a large sum of money by way of mortgage, left the sole negotiation of the affair to an agent, who was afterwards proved to have been in league with the lender (the mortgagee), and permitted his employer to pay, for ten or twelve years, an excess of interest over what he might, with a little exertion, have obtained money for, which actually made a difference in his income of a thousand a-year. Here, looking out of the north-east corner of his eye, the placid speaker, continuing unmoved, observed the Earl start a little, glance somewhat anxiously at him, but in silence, and slightly quicken the pace at which he had been walking. Gammon presently added, in a careless sort of way, that accident had brought him into professional intercourse with that nobleman—[Oh, Gammon! Gammon!]—whom he was ultimately instrumental in saving from the annual robbery that was being inflicted upon him. It was enough; Gammon saw that what he had been saying had sunk like lead into the mind of his companion, who, for the rest of the day, seemed burdened and oppressed with it—or some other cause of anxiety; and, from an occasional uneasy and wistful eye which the Earl fixed upon him at dinner, he felt conscious that not long would elapse before he should hear something from the Earl connected with the topic in question—and he was not mistaken. The very next day they met in the park; and, after one or two casual observations, the Earl remarked that, by the way, with reference to their yesterday's conversation, it "*did so happen*,"—very singularly—that the Earl had a friend who was placed in a situation very similar to that which had been mentioned by Gammon to the Earl; it was a very intimate friend—and the Earl would like to hear what was Mr. Gammon's opinion of the case. Gammon was scarcely able to refrain from a smile, as the Earl went on, evincing every moment a more vivid interest in behalf of his mysterious "*friend*," who at last

stood suddenly confessed as the Earl of Dreddlington; for, in answer to a question of Mr. Gammon, his lordship unwittingly spoke *in the first person!* On perceiving this, he got much confused; but Gammon passed it off very easily; and by his earnest confidential tone and manner, soon soothed and reconciled the Earl to the vexatious disclosure he had made—vexatious only because the Earl had thought fit, so very unnecessarily, to make a mystery of an every-day matter. He rather loftily enjoined Mr. Gammon to secrecy upon the subject, to which Gammon readily pledged himself, and then they entered upon an unrestrained discussion of the matter. Suffice it to say, that in the end Gammon assured the Earl that he would without any difficulty undertake to procure a transfer of the mortgage at present existing on his lordship's property, which should lower his annual payments by at least one-and-a-half per cent; and which, on a rough calculation, would make a difference of very nearly five hundred a-year in the Earl's favour. But Gammon explicitly informed the Earl that he was not to suppose that his interests had been in any way neglected, or he overreached, in the original transaction; that it had been conducted on his lordship's behalf, by his solicitor, Mr. Mudge, one of the most respectable men in the profession; and that a few years made all the difference in matters of this description; and before he, Mr. Gammon, would interfere any further in the business, he requested his lordship to write to Mr. Mudge, enclosing a draft of the arrangement proposed by Mr. Gammon, and desiring Mr. Mudge to say what he thought of it. This the Earl did; and in a few days' time received an answer from Mr. Mudge to the effect that he was happy that there was a prospect of so favourable an arrangement as that proposed, to which he could see no objection whatever; and would co-operate with Mr. Gammon in any way, and at any time, which his lordship might point out. Mr. Gammon was, in fact, rendering here a real and very important service to the Earl; being an able, acute, and energetic man of business—while Mr. Mudge was very nearly superannuated—had grown rich and indolent, no longer attending to business with his pristine energy, but *pottering* and dozing over it, as it were, from day to day; unable, from his antiquated style of doing business, and the constantly narrowing circle of his connections, to avail himself of those resources which were open to younger and more energetic practitioners, with more varied resources. Thus, though money was now much more plentiful, and consequently to be got for a less sum than when, some ten years before, the Earl had been compelled to borrow a large sum upon mortgage, old Mr. Mudge had suffered matters to remain all the while as they were, and so they would have remained but for Gammon's accidental interference; for the Earl was not a man of business—could not bear to talk to any one about the fact of his property being mortgaged—did not like even to think of it; and concluded that good old Mr. Mudge kept a sufficiently sharp eye upon his noble client's interest. The Earl gave Mr. Mudge's letter to Mr. Gammon, and requested him to lose no time in putting himself into communication with Mr. Mudge, for the purpose of effecting the suggested transfer. This Gammon undertook to do; and perceiving that he had fortunately made so strong a lodgment in the Earl's good opinion, whose interests now bound him, in a measure, to Mr. Gammon, he thought that he might safely quit Yatton and return to town, in order to attend to divers matters of pressing exigency. Before his departure, however, he had a very long interview with Titmouse, in the course of which he gave that now submissive personage a few simple, perspicuous, and decisive directions, as to the line of conduct he was to pursue, which alone could conduce to his permanent interests, and which he enjoined him to pursue, on terror of the consequences of failing to do so. The Earl of Dreddlington, in taking leave of Mr. Gammon evinced,

the utmost degree of cordiality that was consistent with the stateliness of his demeanour. He felt real regret at parting with a man of such superior intellect, such a fascinating deference towards himself (the Earl), and it glanced across his mind, that he would be the very fittest man that could be thought of, in respect of fact, energy, and knowledge, to become prime minister to—his Serene Highness the Prince of Hoch-Stiffelhausen Narrenstein Dummleinberg!

The longer that the Earl continued at Yatton—in which he could not have more thoroughly established himself if he had in the ordinary way engaged it for the autumn—the more he was struck with its beauties; and the oftener they presented themselves to his mind's eye, the keener became his regrets at the splitting of the family interests which had so long existed, and his desire to take advantage of what seemed almost an opportunity specially afforded by Providence for reuniting them. As the Earl took his solitary walks he thought with deep anxiety of his own advanced age, and sensibly increasing feebleness. The position of his affairs was not satisfactory. Then he left behind him an only child—and that a daughter—on whom would devolve the splendid responsibility of sustaining, alone, the honours of her ancient family. Then there was his newly-discovered kinsman, Mr. Titmouse, sole and unembarrassed proprietor of this fine old family property; simple-minded and confiding, with a truly reverential feeling towards them, the heads of the family; also the undoubted, undisputed proprietor of Yatton; who entertained and avowed the same liberal and enlightened political opinions, which the Earl had ever maintained, and who, by a rare conjunction of personal merit, and of circumstance, had been elevated to the highest pitch of popularity in the highest regions of society; and who was, moreover, already next in succession, after himself and the Lady Cecilia, to the ancient barony of Drelincourt and the estates annexed to it. How little was there, in reality, to set against all this? An eccentricity of manner, for which nature only, if any one, was to blame; a tendency to extreme modishness in dress, and a slight deficiency in the knowledge of the etiquette of society—but which daily experience and intercourse were rapidly supplying; and a slight disposition towards the pleasures of the table, which no doubt would disappear on the instant of his having an object of permanent and elevating attachment. Such was Titmouse. He had as yet, undoubtedly made no advances to Lady Cecilia, nor evinced any disposition to do so; numerous and favourable had been, and continued to be, the opportunities for his doing so. Might not this, however, be set down entirely to the score of his excessive diffidence—distrust of his pretensions to aspire after so august an alliance as with the Lady Cecilia? Yet there certainly was another way of accounting for his conduct; had he got already entangled with an attachment elsewhere?—Run after in society, as he had been, in a manner totally unprecedented during his very first season—had his affections been inveigled?—When the Earl dwelt upon this dismal possibility, if it were when he was lying awake in bed, he would be seized with a fit of intolerable restlessness—and getting up, wrap himself in his dressing-gown, and pace his chamber for an hour together, running over, in his mind, the names of all the women he knew who would be likely to lay snares for Titmouse, in order to secure him for a daughter. Then there was the Lady Cecilia—but she, he knew, would not run counter to his wishes, and he had therefore no difficulty to apprehend on *that* score. She had ever been calmly submissive to his will; had the same lofty sense of family dignity that he enjoyed; and had often concurred in his deep regrets on account of the separation of the family interests. She was still unmarried—and yet, on her father's decease, would be a peeress in her own right, and possessed of the family estates. The fastidiousness which alone, thought the Earl, had kept her single, would not, he felt persuaded, be

allowed by her to interfere for the purpose of preventing so excellent a family arrangement as would be effected by her union with Titmouse. Once married—and he having secured for her suitable settlements from Titmouse—if there should prove to be any incompatibility of temper or discrepancy of disposition, come the worst to the worst, there was the shelter of a separation and separate maintenance to look to; a thing which was becoming of daily occurrence—which implied no reproach to either party—and left them always at liberty to return to each other's society when so disposed. And as for the dress and manners of Titmouse, granting them to be a little extravagant, would not, in all probability, a word from her suffice to *reduce* him, or *elevate* him into a gentleman? Thus thought her fond and enlightened parent, and thus thought also she; from which it was evident, that Titmouse once brought to the point—made sensible where his duty and privilege converged—it would be a straightforward plain-sailing business. To bring about so desirable a state of things as this—to give the young people an opportunity of thoroughly knowing one another, and endearing themselves to each other, were among the objects which the Earl had proposed to himself, in accepting the invitation to Yatton. Time was wearing on, however, and yet no decisive step had been taken. Lady Cecilia's icy coldness—her petrifying indifference of manner, her phlegmatic temperament and lofty pride, were qualities all of which were calculated rather to check than encourage the advances of the suitor, especially such a one as Titmouse; but, though the Earl did not know it, there were others whose ardour and impatience to possess themselves of such superior loveliness could not be similarly restrained or discouraged. Would the reader believe that Mr. Venom Tuft, having been long on the look-out for an aristocratic wife, had conceived it not impossible to engage the affections of Lady Cecilia—to fascinate her by the display of his brilliant acquirements; and that the comparative seclusion of Yatton would afford him the requisite opportunity for effecting his wishes? Yet even so it really was: intoxicated with vanity, which led him to believe himself peculiarly agreeable to women, he at length had the inconceivable folly and presumption, on the morning after an evening in which he fancied that he had displayed peculiar brilliance, to intimate to her that his affections were no longer under his own control, having been taken captive by her irresistible charms. Vain thought! as well might a cock-sparrow have sought to mate himself with the stately swan? It was for some time rather difficult for the Lady Cecilia to understand that he was seriously making her a proposal. At length, however, he succeeded; and as much astonishment as her drooping eyelids and languid hauteur of manner would permit the display of, she evinced. When poor Tuft found that such was the case his face burned like fire.

"You haven't mistaken me for Miss Macspleuchan, Mr. Tuft, have you?" said she with a faint smile. "You, and Mr. Titmouse, and the Marquis, I hear, sat much longer after dinner last night than usual!" Tuft was entirely confounded. Was her ladyship insinuating that he was under the influence of wine? He was speechless. "I assure you, Lady Cecilia"—he stammered—"Oh—now I understand!—You are rehearsing for Lady Tawdry's private theatricals! Do you play there next month? Well, I dare say you'll make a delicious Romeo." Here the Earl happening to enter, Lady Cecilia, with a languid smile, apprised him that Mr. Tuft had been rehearsing, to admiration, a love-scene which he was studying against Lady Tawdry's theatricals; on which the Earl, with a good-natured smile, said that he should like to witness it, if not too much trouble to Mr. Tuft. If that gentleman could have crept up the chimney without being observed, he would have employed the first moment of repose and security in praying that the Lady Cecilia might bring herself to believe, that he had really been doing what at present he feared

she only affected to believe. He resolved to out-stay the Earl, who, indeed, withdrew in a few minutes' time, having entered only for the purpose of asking Lady Cecilia a question; and on her ladyship and her would-be lover being again alone—

"If I have been guilty of presumption, Lady Cecilia"—he commenced with tremulous earnestness, looking a truly piteous object. "Not in the least, Mr. Tuft," said she, calmly smiling; "or, even if you *have*, I'll forgive it on one condition——" "Your ladyship has only to intimate——" "That you will go through it all with Miss Macspleuchan; or, couldn't we get up a sweet scene with my maid? Annette is a pretty little thing, and her broken English ——"

"Your ladyship is pleased to be exceedingly severe; but I feel that I deserve it. Still, knowing your ladyship's good nature, I will venture to ask one great favour, which, if you refuse, I will within an hour quit Yatton; that your ladyship will, in mercy to my feelings, mention this little scene to no one."

"If you wish it, Mr. Tuft, I will preserve your secret," she replied, in a kinder and more serious manner than he had ever witnessed in her; and, when he had escaped into solitude, he could hardly tell whom he hated most—himself or the Lady Cecilia. Several days afterwards, the Marquis Gants-Jaunes de Millefleurs, purposing to quit Yatton on his way northward, sought a favourable opportunity to lay himself—the brilliant, irresistible Marquis—at the feet of the all-conquering Lady Cecilia, the future Lady Drelincourt, peeress in her own right, and mistress of the family estates. He had done the same kind of thing half-a-dozen times to as many women—all of them of ample fortune, and most of them also of rank. His manner was exquisitely delicate and winning; but Lady Cecilia, with a slight blush (for she was really pleased), calmly refused him. He saw it was utterly in vain; for a few moments he felt in an unutterably foolish position, but quickly recovering himself, assumed an air of delicate raillery, and put her into such good humour, that, forgetful in the moment of her promise to poor Tuft, she, in the strictest confidence in the world, communicated to the Marquis the offer which Mr. Tuft had been beforehand with him in making her! The Marquis's cheek flushed and tingled; and, without being able to analyse what passed through his mind; the result was, an intolerable feeling, as if he and Tuft were a couple of sneaking adventurers, and worse—of ridiculous and exposed adventurers. For almost the first time in his life, he felt an embarrassment amid the momentary conflict of his thoughts and feelings, which kept him silent. At length, "I presume, Lady Cecilia," said he in a low tone, with an air of distress, and a glance that did more in his behalf with Lady Cecilia than a thousand of his most flattering and eloquent speeches, "I shall, in like manner, have afforded amusement to your ladyship and Mr. Tuft?"

"Sir," said she haughtily, and colouring—"Mr. Tuft and the Marquis Gants-Jaunes de Millefleurs, are two very different persons; I am surprised, Monsieur le Marquis, that you should have made such an observation."

Hereupon he felt greatly consoled, and perfectly secure against being exposed to Tuft, as Tuft had been exposed to him. Yet he was mistaken. How can the reader forgive Lady Cecilia for her double breach of promise, when he is informed that a day or two afterwards, Tuft and she being thrown together, partly out of pity to her rejected and bitterly mortified suitor, and partly from an impulse of womanly vanity, and partly from a sort of glimpse of even-handed justice, requiring such a step as a kind of reparation to Tuft for her exposure of him to the Marquis—she (in the strictest confidence, however) informed him that his example had been followed by the Marquis, forgetful of that excellent maxim, "begin nothing of which you have not well considered the end." It had not occurred to her ladyship as being a

thing almost certain to ensue upon her breach of faith, that Tuft would ask her whether she had violated his confidence. He did so: she blushed scarlet—and though, like her papa, she could have *equivocated* when she could not have *lied*, here she was in a dilemma from which nothing but a fib could possibly extricate her; and in a confident tone, but with a burning cheek, she simply told a falsehood, and had the pain of being conscious, by Mr. Tuft's look, that he did not believe her.—Nothing could exceed the comical air of embarrassment of the Marquis and Mr. Tuft, whenever, after this, they were alone together! How fearful lest—how doubtful whether—each knew as much as the other! To return, however, to the Earl of Dreddlington (who was really in ignorance of the Marquis and Mr. Tuft's proposals to Lady Cecilia), the difficulty which at present harassed his lordship was, how he could, without compromising his own dignity, or injuring his darling scheme by a premature development of his purpose, sound Titmouse upon the subject. How to break the ice—to broach the subject—was the great problem which the Earl turned over and over again in his mind. Now, be it observed, that when a muddle-headed man is called upon at length to *act*, however long beforehand he may have had notice of it—however assured of the necessity there will be for eventually taking one course or another, and consequently enjoying an ample opportunity for consideration, he remains confused and irresolute up to the very *last instant*—when he acts, after all, merely as the creature of caprice and impulse! 'Twas thus with Lord Dreddlington. He had thought of half-a-dozen different ways of commencing with Titmouse, and decided upon adopting each; yet, when the anxiously looked-for moment had arrived, he lost sight of them all, in his inward fluster and nervousness.

'Twas noon, and Titmouse, smoking a cigar, was walking slowly up and down, his hands stuck into his surtout pockets, and resting on his hips, in the fir-tree walk at the end of the garden—the spot to which he seemed, during the stay of his grand guests, to have been tacitly restricted for the enjoyment of that luxury. When the Earl saw that Titmouse was aware that his lordship had observed him, and tossed aside his cigar, the Earl “begged” he would go on, and tried to calm and steady himself, by a moment's reflection upon his overwhelming superiority over Titmouse in every respect; but it was in vain.

Now, what anxiety and embarrassment would the Earl have been spared had he been aware of one little fact, that Mr. Gammon was unconsciously, secretly, and potently, his lordship's friend in the great matter which lay so near to his heart? For so it was, in truth. He had used all the art he was master of, and availed himself of all his mysterious power over Titmouse, to get him at all events to make an advance to his distinguished kinswoman. Considering, however, how necessary it was “to be off with the old love before he was on with the new,” he had commenced operations by satisfying Titmouse how vain and hopeless, and, indeed, unworthy of him, was his passion for poor Miss Aubrey. Here, however, Gammon had not so much difficulty to contend with as he had anticipated; for Miss Aubrey's image had been long ago jostled out of his recollection, by the innumerable brilliant and fashionable women among whom he had been latterly thrown. When, therefore, Gammon informed him that Miss Aubrey had fallen into a decline; and that, moreover, when he (Gammon) had, according to his promise to Titmouse, taken an opportunity of pressing his wishes upon her, she had scornfully scouted the bare notion of such a thing [all which was, of course, Mr. Gammon's pure invention]—

“Pon—my soul! The—devil—she did!” said Titmouse, with an air of insolent astonishment. “The gal's a devilish pretty gal, no doubt,” he presently continued, knocking the ashes off his cigar, with an indifferent air; “but—it's too good a joke—pon my soul it is; but d'ye think, Gammon, she ever supposed

I *meant* marriage? By Jove!" Here he winked his eye at Gammon, and then slowly expelled a mouthful of smoke. Gammon had grown pale with the conflict excited within, by the last words of the execrable little miscreant. He controlled his feelings, however, and succeeded in preserving silence. "Ah—well!" continued Titmouse after another whiff or two, with an air of commiseration, "if the poor gal's *booked*—eh? it's no use; there's no harm done. Devilish poor, all of 'em, I hear! It's d——d hard, by the way, Gammon, that the prettiest gals are always the soonest picked off." As soon as Gammon had completely mastered his feelings, he proceeded to excite the pride and ambition of Titmouse by representations of the splendour of an alliance with the last representative of so ancient and illustrious a house; in fact, when Gammon came, he said, to think of it, he found it was *too* grand a stroke, and that she would not entertain the notion for a moment; that she had refused crowds of young lords; that she would be a peeress of the realm in her own right, with an independent income of £5,000 a-year; mansions, seats, and castles, in each of the four quarters of the kingdom;—topics such as these, excited and inflated him to the full extent desired by Mr. Gammon, who, moreover,—that was the great topic of his last interview with Titmouse, before leaving Yatton, as I have already apprised the reader—with great solemnity of manner, gave him distinctly to understand that on his being able to effect an alliance with Lady Cecilia, absolutely depended his continuance in, or expulsion from, the possession of the whole Yatton property. Thus it came to pass that Titmouse was penetrated by a far keener desire to ally himself to the Lady Cecilia than ever the Earl had experienced to bring about such an auspicious event; and at the very moment of Titmouse's catching sight of the Earl, while pacing up and down the fir-tree walk, inhaling the soothing influence of his cigar—as I a short time ago presented him to the reader—he was tormenting himself with apprehensions that such a prize was too splendid for *him* to draw, and asking himself the constantly recurring question, how, in the name of all that was funny, could he set the thing a-going? When Greek met Greek, *then* came—it was said—the tug of war: and when the Earl of Dredd'ington and Titmouse—a great fool and a little fool—came to encounter each other, each impelled by the same wishes, and restrained by similar apprehensions, it was like the encounter of two wily diplomatists, sitting down with the intention of outwitting each other in obtaining an object, in respect of which their aim was, in fact, unknown to each other, precisely coincident, this hidden coincidence being the exact point which their exquisite manœuvres had succeeded in reciprocally masking; it being quite possible for Talleyrand and Pozzo di Borgo, pitted against each other, under similar circumstances, to have separated after a dozen long conferences, each having failed to secure their common object—peace.

"Well, Mr. Titmouse"—commenced the Earl blandly, stepping at once, with graceful boldness, out of the mist, confusion, and perplexity which prevailed amongst his lordship's ideas—"what are you thinking about? For you seem to be thinking!" and a courteous little laugh accompanied the last words.

"'Pon—'pon my life—I—I—*beg* your lordship's pardon—but it's—monstrous odd your lordship should have known it"—stammered Titmouse; and his face suddenly grew of a scarlet colour.

"Sir," replied the Earl with greater skill than he had ever evinced in his whole life before—(such is the effect of any one's being intensely *in earnest*)—"it is not at all odd, when it happens that—the probability is—that—we are, perhaps—mind, sir, I mean possibly—thinking about the same thing!" Titmouse grew more and more confused, gazing in silence, with a strange, simpering stare, at his noble companion, who, with his hands joined behind him, was walking slowly along with Titmouse.

"Sir," continued the Earl, in a low tone—breaking a very awkward pause—"it gives me sincere satisfaction to assure you that I can fully appreciate the delicate embarrassment which I perceive you are now——"

"My lord—your lordship's most *uncommon* polite"—quoth Titmouse, suddenly taking off his hat, and bowing very low. The Earl moved his hat also, and slightly bowed, with a proudly gratified air; and again occurred a little pause, which was broken by Titmouse. "Then your lordship thinks it will do?" he inquired very sheepishly, but anxiously. "Sir, I have the honour to assure you, that as far as *I* am concerned, I see no obst——" "Yes—but excuse me, my lord—your lordship sees—I mean—my lord, your lordship sees——" "Sir I think—nay, I believe *I do*"—interrupted the Earl, wishing to relieve the evident embarrassment of his companion—"but—I see nothing that should—alarm you."

[How interesting to watch the mysterious process by which these two powerful minds were gradually approximating towards understanding each other! 'Twas a sort of *equation* with an unknown quantity, in due course of elimination!]

"Doesn't your lordship, indeed?" inquired Titmouse rather briskly. "Sir, it was a saying of one of the great—I mean, sir, it is—you must often have heard, sir—in short, *nothing venture, nothing have!*" "I'd venture a precious deal, my lord, if I only thought I could get what *I'm* after!" "Sir?" exclaimed the Earl condescendingly. "If your lordship would only be so particular—so uncommon kind—as to name the thing to her ladyship—by way of—eh, my lord? A sort of breaking the ice, and all that——" "Sir, I feel and have a just pride in assuring you that the Lady Cecilia is a young lady of that superior delicacy of——" "*Does* your lordship really think I've a *ghost* of a chance?" interrupted Titmouse anxiously. "*She* must have named the thing to your lordship, no doubt—eh, my lord?"

This queer notion of the young lady's delicacy a little staggered her distinguished father for a moment or two. What was he to say? She and he had really often named the thing to each other; and here the question was put to him plumply. The Earl scorned a flat lie, and never condescended to equivocation except when it was absolutely necessary.

"Sir," he said hesitatingly; "undoubtedly—if I were to say—that now and then, when your attentions have been so pointed——" "'Pon my life, my lord, I never meant it; if your lordship will only believe me," interrupted Titmouse earnestly; "I beg a thousand pardons—I mean no harm, my lord." "Sir, there is no harm done," said the Earl kindly. "Sir, I know human nature too well, or I have lived thus long to little purpose, not to be aware that we are not always master of our own feelings." "That's exactly it, my lord! Excuse me, but your lordship's hit the thing!" "Do not imagine, Mr. Titmouse, that I think your attentions may have been *unpleasant* to the Lady Cecilia—by no means; I cannot, with truth, say any such thing!" "Oh, my lord!" exclaimed Titmouse, taking off his hat, bowing, and placing his hand upon his breast, where his little heart was palpitating with unusual force and distinctness. "*Faint heart*, says the proverb, Mr. Titmouse, ah, ah!" quoth the Earl with gentle gaiety.

"Yes, my lord, it's enough to make one faint, indeed! Now, if your lordship—(I'm not used to the sort of thing, my lord!)—would just make a sort of beginning for me, my lord, with the Lady Cicely—to set us going, my lord—the least shove would do, my lord."

"Well, Mr. Titmouse," said the Earl with a gracious smile, "since your modesty is so overpowering—I'll try—to—become your ambassador to the Lady Cecilia. If, Mr. Titmouse," his lordship presently added, in a serious tone, "you are fortunate enough to succeed in engaging the affections of

the Lady Cecilia, you will discover that you have secured indeed an invaluable prize."

"To be sure, my lord! And consider, too, her ladyship's uncommon high rank—it's so particular condescending. By the way, my lord, will she—if she and I can hit it off, so as to marry one another—be called *Mrs. Titmouse*, or shall I be called *Lord Titmouse*? I wonder how that will be, my lord? 'Tis only, your lordship understands, on Lady Cicely's account I ask, because it's, in course, all one to *me* when once we're married."

The Earl was gazing at him as he went on, with an expression of mingled surprise and concern; presently, however, he added with calm seriousness, "Sir, it is not an unreasonable question, though I should have imagined that you could hardly have been—but—in short, the Lady Cecilia will retain her rank, and become the Lady Cecilia Titmouse—that is, during my life; but, on my demise, she succeeds to the barony of Drelincourt, and then will be called, of course, Lady Drelincourt."

"And what shall *I* be then, my lord?" inquired Titmouse eagerly. "Sir, you will of course continue Mr. Titmouse——" "'Pon my life, my lord—shall I indeed?" he interrupted, with a crest-fallen air, "Mr. Titmouse and Lady Drelincourt? Excuse me, my lord, but it don't sound at all like man and wife——" "Sir, so it always has been, and will be, and so it ever ought to be," replied the Earl gravely. "Well but, my lord (excuse me, my lord)—but marriage is a very serious thing, my lord, your lordship knows——" "It is, sir, indeed," replied the Earl, gloom visibly overspreading his features. "Suppose," continued Titmouse, "Lady Cicely should die before me?"

The Earl, remaining silent, fixed on Titmouse the eye of a father—a father, though a very foolish one; and presently, with a sensible tremor in his voice, replied, "Sir, these are rather singular questions; but, in such a mournful contingency as the one you have hinted at——" "Oh, my lord! I humbly beg pardon—of course, I should be, 'pon my soul, my lord, most uncommon sorry," interrupted Titmouse, with a little alarm in his manner. "I was saying, sir—that in such an event, if Lady Drelincourt left no issue, you would succeed to the barony; but, should she leave issue, they will be called Honourable——" "What!—the Honourable Tittlebat Titmouse, if it's a boy, and the 'Honourable Cecilia Titmouse,' if it's a girl?" "Sir, it will be so—unless you should choose to take the name and arms of Dreddlington, on marrying the sole heiress——" "Oh! indeed, my lord? 'Pon my life, my lord, that's worth considering—because I a'n't over and above-pleased with my own name. What will it cost to change it now, my lord?" "Sir," said the Earl, struck with the idea, "that is really a matter worth considering. In a matter of that magnitude, sir, I presume that expense would not be worth a matter of serious consideration."

After some further conversation, the Earl came plump upon the great pivot upon which the whole arrangement was to turn—settlements and jointures—oh, as to *them*, Titmouse, who was recovering from the shock of the discovery that his marriage, however it might degrade the Lady Cecilia, would not enoble him—promised everything—would leave everything in the hands of his lordship. Soon afterwards they separated, the Earl suggesting to him that probably in a matter of infinite delicacy, like that on which they had been conversing, he would keep his own counsel—to which also Titmouse pledged himself. Soon afterwards, and before seeing his daughter, with an anxious, but not an excited air, he ordered his horse and took a long ride, accompanied only by his groom; and if ever in his whole life he had attempted serious reflection, it was on the occasion of that same long, slow, and solitary ride; then, for the first time, he forgot his peerage, and thought only of the *man*—and the father.

But to what purpose? Shortly after his return he sought Lady Cecilia, and performed his promise, by preparing her to receive, probably on the ensuing day, the proposals of Tittlebat Titmouse.

The desired opportunity occurred the next day. Titmouse had slept like a top all night, after smoking in his bedroom a great many cigars, and drinking two or three tumblers of brandy and water; but Lady Cecilia had passed a very uneasy, and almost a sleepless night, and did not make her appearance at the breakfast-table. Understanding, however, that her ladyship was in the drawing-room and alone, about noon, Titmouse, who had bestowed during the interval more than usual pains upon his dress, gently opened the door, and observing that she was alone, reclining on the sofa, with a sudden beating of the heart, closed the door and approached her, bowing profoundly. Poor Lady Cecilia immediately sat up, very pale and trembling.

"Good morning, good morning, Lady Cicely," commenced Titmouse, taking a chair and sitting down in it, plump opposite to her. "You aren't well this morning, are you, Lady Cicely?" said he, observing how pale she looked, and that she did not seem disposed to speak. "I am quite well," she replied in a low tone; and then each was silent.

"It's beginning to look like winter a little, eh, Lady Cicely?" said he, after an embarrassing pause, looking through the windows. 'Twas an overcast day; and a strong wind was stripping the sere and yellow leaves in great numbers from the lofty trees which were not far distant, and which gave forth a melancholy rushing, moaning sound; and another pause ensued.

"Certainly it is getting rather cheerless," replied Lady Cecilia. Titmouse turned pale; and, twirling his fingers in his hair, fixed upon her a stupid and most embarrassing look, under which her eyes fell towards the ground, and remained looking in that direction.

"I—I—hope his lordship's been saying a good word for me, Lady Cicely."

"My father mentioned your name to me yesterday," she replied, trembling excessively.

"'Pon my soul, monstrous kind!" said Titmouse, trying desperately to look at his ease. "Said he'd break the ice for me." Here ensued another pause. "Everybody must have a beginning, you know. 'Pon my solemn honour, all he said about me is quite true." Profoundly as was Lady Cecilia depressed, she looked up at Titmouse for a moment with evident surprise. "Now, Lady Cicely, just as between friends, didn't he tell you something *very* particular about me? Didn't he? Eh?" She made him no answer.

"I dare say, Lady Cicely, though somehow you look sad enough, you a'n't vexed to see me here? Eh? There's many and many a woman in London that would, but it's no use now. 'Pon my soul I love you, I do, Lady Cicely;" she trembled violently, for he was drawing his chair nearer to her. She felt sick, sick almost to death.

"I know it's—it's a monstrous unpleasant piece of—I mean, it's an awkward thing to do; but I hope you love *me*, Lady Cicely, eh? a little?" Her head hung down, and a very scalding tear oozed out and trickled down her cheek. "Hope you aren't sorry, dear Lady Cicely? *I'm* most uncommon proud and happy! Come, Lady Cicely." He took the thin white hand that was nearest him, and raised it to his lips: had his perception been only a trifle keener, he could not have failed to perceive a faint thrill pervade Lady Cecilia as he performed this act of gallantry, and an expression of features which looked very much like disgust. He had seen love made on the stage frequently, and, as he had seen lovers do there, he now dropped down on one knee, still holding Lady Cecilia's hand in his, and pressing it a second time to his lips.

"If your ladyship will only make me so happy as to be my wife, 'pon my life, your welcome to all I have; and you may consider this place entirely your

own ! Do you understand me, dearest Lady Cicely ? Come ! 'Pon my life, I'm quite distracted—do you love me, Lady Cicely ? Only say the word." A faint, a very faint sound issued from her lips, 'twas " Yes." Oh, poor Lady Cecilia ! Oh fatal—fatal falsehood !

" Then, as true as God's in heaven, dear gal, I love you," said he, with ardour and energy ; and rising from his knee, he sat down beside her upon the sofa, placed an arm round her waist, and with his other hand grasped hers, and imprinted a kiss upon the pale cheek which had been so haughtily withdrawn from the presumptuous advances of the Marquis de Millefleurs, and some half-dozen others ; several of whom were men of high real pretensions, elegant in person and manners, of great accomplishments, of intellect, of considerable fortune, of good family ; but in her opinion, and that of the Earl, her father, not of family good *enough*, nor fortune considerable *enough*, to entitle them to an alliance with her.

" 'Pon my life, Lady Cicely, you *are* a most lovely gal," quoth Titmouse, with increasing energy, " and now you're all my own ! Though I *am* only plain Mr. Titmouse, and you'll be Lady Cicely still. I'll make you a good husband !" and again he pressed her hand and kissed her cold cheek. But slow and dull as were the Lady Cecilia's feelings, they were becoming too much excited to admit of her continuing much longer in the room.

" I'm sure you'll excuse me, Mr. Titmouse," said she rising, and speaking quickly and faintly. When she had regained her room, she wept bitterly for upwards of an hour ; and Miss Macspleuchan, well aware of the cause of it, knew not how to console one who had so deliberately immolated herself before the hideous little image of Mammon ; who, in degrading herself, had also—and Miss Macspleuchan shed bitter and scalding tears, and her bosom swelled with wounded pride and indignation at the thought—degraded her whole sex. In due time however, the *Aurora*, a morning fashionable London newspaper, thus announced to the public as an auspicious event the one which I have so faithfully, feeling much pain the while, described to the reader :—

" It is rumoured that Mr. Titmouse, who so lately recovered the very large estates of Yatton, in Yorkshire, and whose appearance in the fashionable world has created so great a sensation, and who is already connected, by consanguinity, with the ancient and noble family of Dreddlington, is about to form a closer alliance with it, and is now the accepted suitor of the lovely and accomplished Lady Cecilia Philippa Leopoldina Plantagenet, sole daughter and heiress of the Right Hon. the Earl of Dreddlington, and next in succession to the barony of Drelincourt, the most ancient, we believe, in the kingdom."

CHAPTER XXIV.

BEHOLD now, patient and reflecting reader, for in your eyes it is anxiously desired that this history may find favour—the dreadful—the desperate reverse in Mr. Aubrey's circumstances. He has suddenly fallen from a very commanding position in society ; from that of a high-born English gentleman possessed of a fine unencumbered income, and all of luxury and splendour, and of opportunity for gratifying a disposition of noble munificence, that it can secure, and whose qualifications and prospects justified him in aspiring to the highest senatorial distinction ; behold him, I say, with his beloved family, sunk, lower than into straitened circumstances—beneath even poverty—into the palsyng atmosphere of *debt*, and debt, too, of a hopeless description !

Bound hand and foot, so to speak, as Mr. Aubrey felt himself, and entirely

at the mercy of Mr. Titmouse, and his solicitors, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, what could he do but submit to almost any terms on which they chose to insist? It will be recollected that Mr. Gammon's proposal was, that Mr. Aubrey should forthwith discharge, without scrutiny, their bill of £3,946 14s. 6d.; give sufficient security for the payment of the sum of £10,000 to Mr. Titmouse, within twelve or eighteen months' time, and two promissory notes for the sum of £5,000 each, payable at some future period, as to which he had to rely solely on the sincerity and forbearance of Mr. Gammon, and the ratification of his acts by Mr. Titmouse. This proposal was duly communicated by the unfortunate Aubrey to Messrs. Runnington, who obtained a fortnight's time in which to deliberate upon it; at the end of which period, he was advised by them to accept the proposed terms as unquestionably fair, and, under circumstances, much more lenient than could have been expected. This might be so; but yet, how dismaying and hopeless to *him* the idea of carrying it into effect! *How, indeed, was it to be done?* First of all, how were Messrs. Runnington's and Mr. Parkinson's bills to be got rid of—the former amounting to £1,670 12s., the latter to £756? And how were Mr. Aubrey and his family to *live* in the meanwhile, and how, moreover, were to be met the expenses of his legal education? As was intimated in a former part of this history, all that Mr. Aubrey had, on settling in London, was £3,000 stock (equal to £2,640 of money) and £123 in his banker's hands;—so that all his cash in hand was £3,063; and if he were to devote the whole of it to the discharge of the three attorneys' bills which he owed, he would still leave a gross balance unpaid of £3,310 6s. 6d.! And yet for *him* to talk of *giving security* for the payment of £10,000 within eighteen months, and his own notes of hand for £10,000 more! It was really almost maddening to sit down and contemplate all this. But he must not fold his arms in impotence and despair—he must look his difficulties straight in the face, and do the best that was in his power. He resolved to devote every farthing he had, except £200, to the liquidation of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's account, and (in smaller proportion) of those also of Messrs. Runnington and Mr. Parkinson; if necessary he resolved, though his heart thrilled with anguish at the thought, to sell his books, and the remnant of old family plate that he had preserved. Then he would strain every nerve to contribute towards the support of himself and of his family by his literary exertions, in every moment that he could spare from his legal studies; and practise the severest economy that was consistent with health and the preservation of a respectable exterior. He resolved also, though with a shudder, to commit himself to Gammon and Titmouse's mercy, by handing to them (though a fearful farce it seemed) his two notes of hand for £10,000—*payable on demand*—for such Gammon intimated was usual in such a case, and would be required in the present one. But whither was he to look for security for the payment of £10,000 within eighteen months' time? This was a matter that indeed staggered him, and almost prostrated his energies whenever he directed them to the subject; it occasioned him inexpressible agitation and anguish. Individuals there were, he believed—he knew—who would cheerfully enter into the desired security on his behalf; but what a mockery—cruel and insulting! For them to be asked to secure *his* payment of the sum at the time mentioned, was, in effect, palpably asking them to pay the money for him, and in that light they could not but view such an application. The reader will easily understand the potency of such considerations upon so sensitive and high-minded a person as Aubrey. While revolving these distracting and harassing topics in his mind, the name of Lord De la Zouch always presented itself to him. Had he not solemnly—repeatedly—*pledged* himself to communicate with that kind, and wealthy, and generous nobleman, in such an emergency as the present? His lordship's income was

at least eighty or a hundred thousand pounds a-year; his habits were simple and unostentatious, though he was of a truly munificent disposition; and he had not a large and expensive family—his only child being Mr. Delamere. He had ever professed, and, as far as he had hitherto had an opportunity, proved himself to be a devoted, a most affectionate friend to Mr. Aubrey:—did not Providence, then, seem to point him out distinctly as one who should be applied to, to rescue from destruction a fallen friend? And why should Aubrey conjure up an array of imaginary obstacles, arising out of excessive and morbid fastidiousness? And whom were such scruples reducing to destitution along with him!—his wife, his children, his sister! But, alas! the thought of sweet Kate suggested another source of exquisite pain and embarrassment to Aubrey, who well knew the ardent and inextinguishable passion for her entertained by young Delamere. 'Twas true, that to pacify his father, and also not to harass Miss Aubrey by the constant attentions with which he would have otherwise followed her, he had consented to devote himself to his last year's studies at Oxford; yet was he by no means an infrequent visitor at Vivian Street, resolutely regardless of the earnest entreaties of Miss Aubrey, and even of her brother. Not that there was ever anything indelicate or obtrusive in his attentions;—how could it be? Alas! Kate really loved him, and it required no very great acuteness in Delamere to discover it. He was as fine, handsome a young fellow as you could see anywhere; frank, high-spirited, accomplished, with an exceedingly elegant deportment, and simple, winning manners—and could she but be touched with a lively sense of the noble disinterestedness of his attachment to her! I declare that Kate wrote him several letters in dissuasion of his addresses, that wore such a genuine and determined air of repulsion as would have staggered most men; but young Delamere cared not one straw for any of them: let Kate vary her tone as she pleased, he simply told her that he had sent them to his mother, who said they were very good letters indeed; so he would make a point of reading all she would send him, and so forth. When Kate, with too solemn an emphasis to be mistaken or encountered with raillery, assured him that nothing upon earth should prevail upon her to quit her present station in her brother's family, at all events until he had completely surmounted all his troubles, Delamere, with looks of fond admiration, would reply that it signified nothing, as he was prepared to wait her pleasure, and submit to any caprice or unkindness which her heart would let her exhibit. I must own that poor Kate was, on more than one occasion of his exhibiting traits of delicate generosity towards her brother, so moved and melted towards her lover, that she could—shall I say it?—have sunk into his arms in silent and passionate acquiescence; for her heart had, indeed, long been really his.

Now, to return, I say, that when Mr. Aubrey adverted for a moment to this state of things, was it not calculated a thousand-fold to enhance the difficulty of applying to *the father of Delamere*? So indeed it was; and, torn with conflicting emotions and considerations of this kind, nearly the whole of the fortnight granted to him for deliberation had elapsed, before he could make up his mind to apply to Lord De la Zouch. At length, however, with a sort of calm desperation, he determined to do so; and when he had dropped into the Post-Office his letter—one in every line of which the noble and generous person to whom it was addressed might easily detect the writhings of its writer's wounded spirit—he looked indeed a melancholy object. The instant that, by dropping his letter into the box, he had irrecoverably parted with all control over it, and to Lord De la Zouch it must go, Aubrey felt as if he would have given the world to recall it. Never had he heaved so many profound sighs, and felt so utterly miserable and destitute, as during his walk homeward that afternoon. There they did not know of the step he

had intended to take, nor did he tell them that he had taken it. When he saw his sister he felt sick at heart: and during the whole of the evening was so oppressed and subdued, that the faint anxious rallery of Mrs. Aubrey and Kate, and the unconscious sportiveness of his children, served only to deepen the gloom that was around his spirit. He had requested Lord De la Zouch to address his answer to him at the Temple! and sure enough, by return of post, Mr. Aubrey found lying on his desk, on reaching the Temple, three or four mornings afterwards, a letter addressed, "Charles Aubrey, Esq., at—Weasel's, Esq., No. 3, Pomegranate Court, Temple, London;" and franked, "DE LA ZOUCH."

"I shall return presently," said Mr. Aubrey to the clerk, with as much calmness as he could assume, having put the letter into his pocket, resolving to go into the Temple Gardens and there read it, where any emotion which it might excite would be unobserved. Having at length seated himself on a bench, under one of the old trees near the river, with a somewhat tremulous hand he took out and opened the letter, and read as follows:—

"Fotheringham Castle,
"18th July, 18—.

"MY VERY DEAR AUBREY,

"If you really value my friendship, never pain my feelings again by expressions of distrust as to the issue of *any* application of yours to me, such as are contained in your letter lying before me. Has anything that has ever hitherto passed between us justified them? For Heaven's sake, tell your attorneys not to lose a moment in procuring the necessary instruments, and forwarding them to me through Messrs. Framlingham, my lawyers; I will then execute them immediately, and return them to you by the next post or mail. If you will but at once set about this in a business-like way, I will forgive and forget all the absurd and *unkind* scruples with which your letter abounds. Since you would probably make a mighty stir about it, I shall not at present dwell upon the *inexpressible pleasure* it would give me to be allowed to emancipate you at once from the vulgar and grasping wretches who are now harassing you, my very dear Aubrey, and to constitute myself your creditor instead of them. But, on further consideration, I suppose you would distress yourself on the ground of *my restricted means* rendering it so much more difficult for me than for them to give you time for the payment of your debt!! Or will you play the man, and act at once in the way in which, I assure you upon my honour, I would act by you, on a similar solicitation, were our situations reversed? By the way, I intend to insist on being your *sole surety*; unless, indeed, your creditors doubt my solvency, in which case I hope we shall be able, amongst our common friends, to find a sufficient co-surety.

"And now, dear Aubrey, how get you on with law? Does she smile or scowl upon you? I wonder why you did not go to the fountain-head and become at once a pupil to your friend, the Attorney-General. Who is the gentleman whom you are reading with? He certainly has rather a curious name! Well, my dear Aubrey, Heaven in its own good time crown your virtuous efforts—your unconquerable resolution—with success! Won't it be odd if, when I am dead and gone, and my son is occupying my present place on the benches, you should be sitting on the woolsack? More unlikely things than this have come to pass: look at——!

"How are dear Mrs. Aubrey and Miss Aubrey, and your little ones? Though we are going in a fortnight's time to fill this old place (the——s, the——s, and the——s, and others are coming), we shall be till then quite deserted, and so after they are gone. Would that we could insist on all of you taking

up your abode with us! Have you seen Geoffry lately? He tells me that he is working very hard indeed at Oxford; and so says his tutor. It is more than ever I did. Pray write me by return. I am ever, my dear Aubrey, yours, faithfully and affectionately,

“DE LA ZOUCH.

“CHARLES AUBREY, Esq.”

“P.S.—On further consideration, let *your* people send the deeds, etc., at once on to me, direct from themselves. 'Tis a private matter, which is of no consequence to anyone but ourselves. No one, indeed, except ourselves, your own solicitors, and your opponents, need know anything about it. Neither Lady De la Zouch nor my son will have the least inkling of the matter.”

No language of mine can do justice to the feelings with which Mr. Aubrey, after many pauses, occasioned by irrepressible emotion, perused the foregoing letter. Its generosity was infinitely enhanced by its delicacy, and both were most exquisitely appreciated by a man of his susceptibility, and in his circumstances. His eyes—his heart overflowed with unutterable gratitude towards the Almighty, and the noble instrument of His mercy. He would have flown on the wings of the wind to the dear beings in Vivian Street, with joyous face and light elastic step, to make them participators in his joy. He rose and walked to and fro by the river side with most exhilarated spirits. The sky was cloudless, the sun shone brilliantly, and innumerable brisk and busy crafts were moving to and fro upon the swelling bosom of the magnificent Thames. Gladness was in his soul. The light without was typical of that within. Several times he was on the point of starting off to Vivian Street; but, on consideration, he resolved to go to Messrs. Runnington, and set them into instant communication with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and matters having been set in train for the speediest possible settlement, Mr. Aubrey returned to chambers, but quitted them an hour earlier than usual, to brighten the countenances of those he loved by the joyous intelligence he bore. But he found that they also had cheering news to communicate, so that this was indeed a memorable day to them.

Old Lady Stratton, an early and bosom friend of the late Mrs. Aubrey, had it may easily be believed, never ceased to take a lively interest in the fortunes of the unhappy Aubreys. She was now far advanced in years, and though she enjoyed an ample income, derived from the liberality of her husband, Sir Beryl Stratton, Baronet, who had died some twenty or thirty years before, yet, having no children, and seeing no necessity for saving money, she had followed the noble example of her deceased friend Mrs. Aubrey, and bestowed annually all her surplus income in the most liberal and systematic charity. Many years before, however, she had resolved upon making a provision for Miss Aubrey, whom she loved as if she had been her mother, and the expedient she had resorted to (quite unknown to the Aubreys) was to insure her life for the sum of £15,000, the whole of which sum she had intended to bequeath to Miss Aubrey. The premiums on so large an insurance as this were heavy annual drains upon her purse; and, together with her charities, and the expenditure necessary to support her station, left her but stinted means for contributing to the relief of the ruined Aubreys. With some difficulty, however, the old lady, in one way or another, principally by effecting a loan from the insurance company upon her policy, had contrived to raise a sum of £2,000; and Miss Aubrey had that morning received a letter from her, full of tenderness, begging her to present the sum in question (for which Lady Stratton had lodged a credit with her bankers in London) to her brother Mr. Aubrey, to dispose of as he pleased—trusting that it might be effectual in relieving him from the difficulties which were more immediately pressing upon him. Never had they

spent so happy an evening together since they had quitted Yatton. In the excitement of the hour, even Aubrey felt for a while as if they now saw their way through all their embarrassments and dangers. Can the reader imagine what must have been the feelings of Miss Aubrey when she first heard of, and afterwards reflected upon, the princely munificence of Lord De la Zouch? If he can, it is well—it is more than I am equal to describing. They kept her awake more than half the night, and when she appeared at breakfast, her brother's quick eye detected in her countenance the traces of a severe conflict of feelings. With him also much of the excitement occasioned by the two occurrences above mentioned, had disappeared by the time that he took his seat in his little study at his usual early hour. First of all, he felt very uneasy in receiving so large a sum from Lady Stratton, whom he knew not to be rich—at all events, not rich enough to part with so considerable a sum without inconvenience; and he resolved not to accept of her proffered kindness, unless she would allow him to transmit to her his bond for the amount, together with interest. Surely this was an unnecessary step; yet where is the man who, on all occasions, acts precisely as a calm and reflecting observer of his conduct, *long afterwards*, could have wished him to act? One must make allowance for the feelings which prompted him—those of a highly honourable and independent and over-sensitive man, who felt himself oppressed already by the weight of pecuniary obligation which he had incurred, and sought for the semblance of relief to his feelings by receiving that as a loan only which had been nobly proffered as a gift; and thus, as it were, in point of fact destroying all the grace and courtesy of the benefaction; but it is useless discussing the matter. I regret that Mr. Aubrey should have allowed himself to be influenced by such considerations; but so it was—and poor old Lady Stratton was informed by him in a letter certainly abounding in expressions of heartfelt gratitude and affection, that he had availed himself of her generous assistance, but only on the terms of his being allowed to deposit his bond for the repayment of it, with interest, with her solicitors, trusting that, ere long, he should be enabled to fulfil his engagements to all who had assisted him.

This seasonable assistance enabled him to make the following arrangement for liquidating the sums due on the account of tremendous attorney's bills:—

Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's bill was	.	.	.	.	£3946	14	6
Messrs. Runnington's	.	.	.	.	1670	12	0
Mr. Parkinson's	.	.	.	.	756	0	0
					£6373	6	6

These were his liabilities. Then his assets were:—

Money in the funds.	.	.	.	.	.	.	£2640
Money at his banker's	.	.	.	.	.	.	423
Advanced by Lady Stratton	.	.	.	.	.	.	2000
							£5063

As soon as he had made the foregoing statement on a slip of paper early in the morning in his study, he averted his eye from it for a moment with a sort of cold shudder. Were he to devote every farthing of assets that he had, he still could not come within £1,310 odd of his mere attorney's bills. What was he to do? The result of a long and anxious morning's calculation and scheming was to appropriate £4,000 of his assets thus—(if he could prevail upon his creditors to be for the present content with it):—

To Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap		£2500
Messrs. Runnington		1000
Mr. Parkinson		500
		£4000

If this arrangement could be effected, then he would be able to reserve in his own hands £1,063, and retain liabilities as under:—

Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's (balance)		£1446 14 6
Messrs. Runnington's (ditto)		670 12 0
Mr. Parkinson's (ditto)		256 0 0
		£2373 6 6

Heavy was his heart at beholding this result of even the most favourable mode of putting his case: but he placed the memorandum in his pocket-book, and repaired to his dressing-room; and having completed his toilet, appeared at breakfast with as cheerful a countenance as he could assume. Each of the three assembled perceived, however, that the others were *striving* to appear gay and happy. Suffice it to say, that within a week's time, Messrs. Runnington received the necessary security from Lord De la Zouch, who had thereby bound himself in the penal sum of £20,000 that Mr. Aubrey should, on or before the 24th day of January, 18— (that is, in eighteen months' time from the date of the bond), pay the principal sum of £10,000, with interest at 5 per cent.; and this instrument, together with Mr. Aubrey's two promissory-notes for £5,000 each, and also cash to the amount of £2,500 in part payment of their bill, having been delivered to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—who, after a great deal of reluctance on the part of Mr. Quirk, finally consented to allow the balance of £1,446 14s. 6d. to stand over—they delivered to him, first a receipt for so much on account of their own bill: and secondly, an instrument by which Tittlebat Titmouse, for the considerations therein expressed, did remise, release, and for ever quit claim, unto Charles Aubrey, his heirs, executors, and administrators, all other demands whatsoever [*i.e.*, other than the said sum of £20,000]. By this arrangement Mr. Aubrey was absolutely exonerated from the sum of £40,000, in which he stood indubitably indebted to Mr. Titmouse, and so far he had just cause for congratulation. But was not his situation still one calculated to depress and alarm him more and more every time that he contemplated it? Where was he to find the sum requisite to release Lord De la Zouch from any part of his dreadful liability? For with such a surety, in their power as that great and opulent peer, was it likely that Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, would be otherwise than peremptory and inflexible when the day of payment arrived? And if so, with what feelings must Mr. Aubrey see his noble and generous friend called upon to pay down nearly £11,000 for him? And was he not liable at any moment upon his own two notes for £5,000 each? And were they not likely to insist speedily on the discharge of their own serious balance of £1,446 odd?

Still pressed, as indeed he was, his spirit had by no means lost its elasticity, supported as he was by a powerful, an unconquerable *will*—and also by a devout reliance upon the protection of Providence. Though law is indeed an exhausting and absorbing study, and it was pursued by Mr. Aubrey with unflagging energy, yet he found time (those who choose may find time enough for everything) to contribute sensibly to the support of himself and his family by literary labours, expended principally upon compositions of an historical and political character, and which were forwarded from time to time to the dis-

tinguished Review which has been already mentioned. To produce, as he produced, articles of this description—of considerable length and frequency—requiring ready, extensive, and accurate knowledge, and careful composition; original and vigorous in their conception and their execution, and by their intrinsic merit arresting, immediately on their appearance, the attention of the public; I say, to do all this, and only in those precious intervals which ought to have been given to the relaxation of his strained faculties and physical powers—and under the pressure, too, of such overpowering anxieties as were his—argued surely the possession of first-rate energies—of a perfectly indomitable resolution. All this while, moreover, he contrived to preserve an unruffled *temper*—which, with a man of such sensibilities as his, afforded indeed a signal instance of self-control; and, in short, on all these grounds, Mr. Aubrey appears entitled to the sympathy and respect of all reflecting persons. I spoke of his anxieties. Suppose, thought he, health should fail him, what was to become of him, and of those dependent upon him? Suppose illness should invade the members of his family, what was in prospect but destitution—or surrendering them up—bitter and heart-breaking contingency!—to the precarious *charity* of others? What would avail all his exhausting labours in the acquisition of professional knowledge, while his liberty was entirely at the command of Mr. Titmouse, and Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, who might, at any moment, actuated by mercenary motives or impelled by caprice, blight all his prospects, and incarcerate him in a prison! Yet, under this burden—Mr. Aubrey stood firmly. He felt that he was called upon to endure it; a blessed spirit ever, as it were, beside him, whispering the consolatory assurance, that all this was ordered and designed by the Supreme Disposer of events, as a *trial* of his constancy, and of his faith, and that the *issue* was with Him. It is mercifully ordained, that “hope springs eternal in the human breast,” and that, too, in every turn and variety of mortal misery. It was so with Aubrey. So long as he felt his health unimpaired, and his mental energies in full vigour, he looked on these blessings as a sort of guarantee from Heaven that he should be able to carry on a successful, though it might be a long and wearisome struggle with adverse circumstances. Still it cost him a very painful effort to assume and preserve that exterior of tranquility which should calm and assure the beloved beings associated with him in this hour of peril and suffering; and oftener than they chose to let him know of it, did the keen eye of a wife’s and sister’s love detect the gloom and oppression which darkened his countenance and saddened his manner. Theirs was, after all, with all that I have said, a happy little home. He was almost always punctual to his dinner-hour, to a minute, knowing how a thousand fears on his account would otherwise assail the fond beings who were counting the minutes till his arrival. When they had once thus met, they never separated till bed-time. Sometimes Miss Aubrey would sit down to her piano, and accompany herself in some song or air, which equally, whether merry or mournful, revived innumerable touching and tender recollections of former days, and she often ceased, tremulously and in tears, in which she was not unfrequently joined by both of those who had been listening to her. Then he would betake himself to his labours for the rest of the evening (not quitting the room), they either assisting him—fair and eager amanuenses! or themselves reading, or engaged at needlework. Oh! it was ecstasy, too, to that poor oppressed father to enter into the wild sports and gambols of his light-hearted little ones, Charles and Agnes, who always made their appearance for about a couple of hours after dinner; to tell them “stories,” to listen to theirs, to show them pictures, to hear Charles read, and to join heartily in their frolics, rolling about even on the floor with them. But when he paused for a moment, and his wife and Kate succeeded him as their playmates, for a short interval, when his eye followed their movements,

what sudden and sharp pangs would pass through his heart, as he thought of the future and what was to become of them!—And when their maid arrived at the appointed hour, causing all sport instantly to cease, and longing looks to be directed to papa and mamma, saying as plainly as could be said, “only a few minutes more,” how fondly would he fold them in his arms! and when he felt their little arms clasping his neck and caressing him, and their kisses “all over” his face, feelings were excited within him, which were too deep for utterance—which defy description.

Oh, happy ye, now reading these pages, “*unto whom the lines are fallen in pleasant places, yea, who have a goodly heritage;*” who live, as it were, in a “*land flowing with milk and honey!*” with whom life glides away like a tranquil and pleasant dream; who are not sternly bidden, “*to eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and with carefulness,*” nor “*in vain to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows;*” who have, indeed, “*no thought for the morrow;*”—oh, ye who have leisure and ample means to pursue the objects of an honourable ambition, undisturbed by daily fears for daily bread—by terror, lest implacable creditors should at length frustrate all your efforts, drive you from your position in society, and precipitate you and yours into ruin;—I say, oh ye! I do appeal to you in vain? Do you turn from this painful portion of my narrative with indifference, or contempt, or wearisomeness? If the mere *description*, brief though it may be, of the sufferings of the Aubreys be trying and disagreeable to you, what must have been to them the actual *endurance*? Poor Aubrey, as he walked along the crowded thoroughfares, morning and evening, between the Temple and Vivian Street, what a disheartening consciousness he felt of his personal insignificance! Which of the passengers, patrician or plebeian, that met or passed him, cared one straw for him, or *would* have cared a straw for him, had they even known the load of misery and misfortune under which he staggered past them? Every time that he thus passed between the scene of his absorbing labours at the Temple, and that green spot—his house in Vivian Street—in the world’s wide desert, where only his heart was refreshed by the never-failing spring of domestic love and tenderness, he felt, as it were, but a prisoner out upon parole! Never, indeed, did the timid eye of the most tattered, starved, and emaciated object that is suffered to crawl along the streets catch that of Mr. Aubrey, without making his heart acknowledge the secret bond of misery which bound them together—that he beheld a brother in bondage, and on whom he cheerfully bestowed the humble pittance which he believed that Providence had yet left at his disposal. Prosperity and adversity have equally the effect upon an inferior mind and heart, of generating *selfishness*. The one encourages, the other forces it. Misery is apt to think its own sufferings greater than those of anyone else—and naturally. The eye, as it were, is filled with the object—distress and danger—that is nearest—that is in such fearful contiguity, obscuring from view all remoter objects, at once scaring away presence of mind, and centering its hopes and fears upon *self*. Not so, however, is it when a noble nature is the sufferer—and more especially when that nature is strengthened and brightened by the support and consolation derived from philosophy—and, above all, religion. To many a strong spirit, destitute of such assistance, alas! how often, under similar circumstances, have come—ghastly visitants!—*Despair* and *Madness*, with their hideous attendant *SUICIDE*, to do their bidding?

To Mr. Aubrey the Sabbath was indeed not only a day for performing the public services of religion, but also a day of real rest from the labours of life. It was not one to him of puritanical gloom or excitement, but of sincere, cheerful, fervent, enlightened devotion. It would have been to the reader, I think, not an uninteresting sight to behold this unfortunate and

harassed family at church. They took almost the only pew that was vacant in the gallery—in a church not far distant from Vivian Street—a pew just holding themselves and little Charles, who, since their arrival in town, had begun to accompany them to the morning service. There was something in their appearance—punctual as they were to morning and evening service—that could hardly fail to interest any one who observed them. Two very elegant and lovely women, dressed in simple half-mourning—he of calm gentlemanly manners, an intellectual countenance, but overshadowed with deep seriousness, if not melancholy—as, indeed, was the case with the whole of the little group, except the child. If their mere appearance was thus calculated to interest those around, much would that interest have been increased had the beholder possessed an inkling of their singular and melancholy history? Here were individuals, whose condition was testing the reality of the consolations of religion, exhibiting humility, resignation, faith, a deep delight in attending the house of HIM who had permitted such dreadful disasters to befall them, and whose will it yet seemed to be that they should pass through deeper sufferings than they had yet experienced. His temple seemed, indeed, to them a refuge and shelter from the storm. To Mr. Aubrey every portion of the church service was precious, for its purity, its simplicity, its solemnity, its fervour, its truly scriptural character, its adaptation to every imaginable condition of feeling and of circumstance, indeed “to all sorts and conditions of men.” There was a little circumstance, fraught with much interest, which occurred to them shortly after they had commenced their attendance at the church. An occasional sermon was preached one evening by a stranger, from the words “*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him,*” on behalf of a neighbouring dispensary. Mr. Aubrey was soon struck by the unusual strength and beauty of the sermon in point of composition. Its language was at once chaste, pointed, and forcible; its reasoning clear and cogent; its illustration apt and vivid; its pathos genuine. As he went on, Mr. Aubrey became more and more convinced that he had seen or heard the preacher before; and on inquiring, afterwards, his name, his impressions proved to be correct; the preacher had been at Oxford, at the very same college with him, and this was the first time that they had since come within sight of each other. Mr. Aubrey at once introduced himself, and was recognised, and they renewed their early friendship. Mr. Neville, poor soul, had nothing on earth to support himself with but an afternoon lectureship in one of the city churches, from which he derived about £75 a-year; and on this sum alone he had contrived, for the last four or five years, to support both himself and his wife—a very amiable and fond woman. Fortunately they had no children but they had seen much affliction, each of them being in but middling health, and a sad proportion of his little income was, consequently, devoted to doctors’ bills. He was an admirable scholar; a man of very powerful understanding, and deeply read in metaphysics and divinity. Yet this wretched pittance was all he could procure for his support; and pinching work for them, poor souls, it was indeed, to “make ends meet.” They lived in very small but creditable lodgings; and amid all their privations, and with all the gloom of the future before them, they were as cheerful a little couple as the world ever saw. They were, both of them, entirely resigned to the will of Heaven as to their position—nay, in all things. She generally accompanied him whithersoever he went; but on the present occasion the good little creature was lying at home in bed, enduring great suffering; and the thought of it made the preacher’s heart very heavy, and his voice to falter a little, several times during his sermon.—He was perfectly delighted when Mr. Aubrey introduced himself; and when the latter had heard all his friend’s little history—who had indeed a child-like simplicity and frankness, and told Mr. Aubrey every-

thing he knew about himself—Mr. Aubrey wrung his hand with great emotion, almost too great for expression. It seemed that a bishop, before whom poor Neville had accidentally preached seven years before, had sent for him, and expressed such a very high opinion of his sermon, as led him reasonably to look for some little preferment at his lordship's hands, but in vain. Poor Neville had no powerful friends, and the bishop was overwhelmed with applicants for everything he had to give away; so it is not much to be wondered at that in time he totally lost sight of Mr. Neville, and of the hopes which had blossomed but to be blighted. What touched Mr. Aubrey to the soul, was the unaffected cheerfulness with which poor Mr. Neville—now in his fortieth year—reconciled himself to his unpromising circumstances, the calmness with which he witnessed the door of preferment evidently shut upon him for ever. Mr. Aubrey obtained from him his address; and resolved that, though for reasons long ago mentioned he had withdrawn from almost every one of his former friends and associates, yet with this poor, this neglected but happy clergyman, he would endeavour to renew and cement firmly their early-formed but long-suspended friendship. And when, on his return to Vivian Street (whither Mrs. and Miss Aubrey had proceeded alone, at his request, while he walked on with Mr. Neville), he told them the little history which I have above indicated to the reader, how the hearts of all of them went forth towards one who was in many respects a fellow-sufferer with themselves, and, *practising what he preached*, was really a pattern of resignation to the will of God; of humble but hearty faith in His mercy and loving-kindness!

Mr. Aubrey was not long in paying his promised visit to Mr. Neville, accompanied by Mrs. Aubrey. 'Twas a long and not very agreeable walk for them, towards St. George's in the East; and on reaching a small row of neat houses, only one story high, and being shown into Mr. Neville's very little sitting-room, they found Mrs. Neville lying on a little rickety sofa near the fire, looking very ill, and Mr. Neville sitting before her, with a number of books on the table, and pen, ink, and paper, with which he was occupied preparing his next Sunday's sermon; but there was also a slip of paper on the table of a different description, and which had occasioned both of them great distress; viz., a rather peremptory note from their medical man, touching the payment of his "trifling account" of £14 odd. Where poor Neville was to obtain such a sum, neither he nor his wife knew: they had already almost deprived themselves of necessary food and clothing, to enable them to discharge another account, and this new demand of an old claim had indeed grievously disquieted them. They said nothing about it to Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey, who soon made themselves at home, and by their unaffected simplicity and cordiality of manner, relieved their humble hosts from all anxiety. They partook of tea, in a sufficiently homely and frugal style; and before they rose to go they exacted a promise, that, as soon as Mrs. Neville should have recovered, they would both come and spend a long day in Vivian Street. They soon became very intimate; and, Mrs. Neville's health at length being such as to preclude her from attending at all to her needle, the reader will probably think none the less of Miss Aubrey and Mrs. Aubrey, when he hears that they insisted on taking that task upon themselves (a matter in which they were becoming somewhat expert), and many and many an hour did these two charming women spend, both in Vivian Street and at Mrs. Neville's, in relieving her from her labours—particularly in preparing their winter clothing. And now that I am on this point, I may as well mention another not less amiable trait in Kate; that, hearing of a girl's school about to be founded in connection with the church which they attended, and in support of which several ladies had undertaken to prepare various little matters, such as embroidery, lace, pictures, and

articles of fancy and ornament, Kate also set to work with her pencil and brushes. She was a very tasteful draughtswoman; and produced four or five such delicate and beautiful sketches, in water colour, of scenes in and about Yatton, as made her a very distinguished contributor to the undertaking; each of her sketches producing upwards of two guineas. She also drew a remarkably spirited crayon sketch of the pretty little head of Charles—who accompanied her to the place where her contributions were deposited, and delivered it in with his own hand.

They kept up—especially Kate—a constant correspondence with good old Doctor Tatham; who, judging from the frequency and the length of his letters, which were written with a truly old-fashioned distinctness and uniformity of character, must have found infinite pleasure in his task. So also was it with Kate, who, if she had ever been writing to her lover—nay, between ourselves, what would Mr. Delamere have given to have had addressed to himself one of the long letters, crossed down to the very postscript, full of sparkling delicacy, good nature, and good sense, which so often found their way to the “Rev. Dr. Tatham, Yatton Vicarage, Yorkshire!” They were thus apprised of everything of moment that transpired at Yatton, to which their feelings clung with unalienable affection. Dr. Tatham’s letters had indeed almost always a painful degree of interest attached to them. From his frequent mention of Mr. Gammon’s name—and almost equally *favourable* as frequent—it appeared that he possessed a vast ascendancy over Mr. Titmouse, and was, whenever he was at Yatton, in a manner, its moving spirit. The Doctor represented Titmouse as a truly wretched creature, with no more sense of religion than a monkey; equally silly, selfish, and vulgar—unfeeling and tyrannical wherever he had an opportunity of exhibiting his real character.

It exquisitely pained them, moreover, to find pretty distinct indications of a sterner and stricter rule being apparent at Yatton, than had ever been known there before, so far as the tenants and villagers were concerned. Rents were now required to be paid with the utmost punctuality; many of them were raised, and harsher terms introduced into their leases and agreements. In Mr. Aubrey’s time a distress or an action for rent was literally a thing unheard of in any part of the estate; but nearly a dozen had occurred since the accession of Mr. Titmouse. If this was at the instance of the ruling spirit, Mr. Gammon had certainly got none of the odium of the proceeding, every letter announcing a resort to those extreme proceedings, being expressly authorized by Mr. Titmouse personally; Mr. Gammon, on most of such occasions, putting in a faint word or two in favour of the tenant, but ineffectually. The legal proceedings were always conducted in the name of “Bloodsuck and Son,” whose town agents were, “Quirk, Gammon, and Snap”; but *their* names never came under the eye of the defendants! No longer could the poor villagers, and poorer tenants, reckon on their former assistance from the Hall in the hour of sickness and distress: cowslip wine, currant wine, elderberry wine, if made, were consumed in the Hall. In short, there was a discontinuance of all those innumerable little endearing courtesies, and charities, and hospitalities, which render a good old country mansion the very *heart* of the neighbourhood. The Doctor, in one of his letters, intimated, with a sort of agony, that he had heard it mentioned by the people at the Hall, as probable that Mr. Titmouse—the little Goth—would pull down that noble old relic, the turreted gateway; but that Mr. Gammon was vehemently opposed to such a measure; and that, if it were preserved after all, it would be entirely owing to the taste and the influence of that gentleman. Had Dr. Tatham chosen, he could have added a fact that would indeed have saddened his friends—viz., that the old sycamore, which had been preserved at the fond entreaties of Kate, and which was hallowed by so many sad and tender associations, had been long ago removed

as a sort of eyesore; Mr. Gammon had, in fact, directed it to be done; but he repeatedly expressed to Dr. Tatham, confidentially, his regret at such an act on the part of Titmouse. He could also have told them that there had been a dog-fight in the village, at which Mr. Titmouse was present! Persons were beginning to make their appearance in the village, of a very different description from any that had been seen there in the time of the Aubreys—persons, now and then, of loose, and wild, and reckless characters. Mr. Titmouse would often get up a fight in the village, and reward the victor with five or ten shillings! Then the snug and quiet little “Aubrey Arms” was metamorphosed into the “Titmouse Arms”; and another set up in opposition to it, and called “The Toper’s Arms”; and it was really painful to see the increasing trade driven by each of them. They were both full every night, and often during the day also; and the vigilant, and affectionate, and grieved eye of the good vicar noticed several seats in the church, which had formerly been occupied every Sunday morning and afternoon, to be—empty! In his letters, he considerably sank the grosser features of Titmouse’s conduct, which would have only uselessly grieved and disgusted his beloved correspondents. He informed them, however, from time to time, of the different visitors at the Hall, particularly of the arrival and movements of their magnificent kinsfolk, the Earl of Dreddlington and Lady Cecilia, the Marquis Gants-Jaunes de Millefleurs and Mr. Tuft—the novel state and ceremony which had been suddenly introduced there—at which they all ceased reading for a moment, and laughed, well knowing the character of Lord Dreddlington. At length, some considerable time after Mr. Titmouse’s grand visitors had been at the Hall, there came a letter from Dr. Tatham, sent by a private hand, and not reaching Vivian Street till the evening, when they were sitting together, after dinner, as usual, and which contained intelligence that was received in sudden silence, and with looks of astonishment; viz., *that Mr. Titmouse had become the acknowledged suitor of the Lady Cecilia!!* Mr. Aubrey, after a moment’s pause, laughed more heartily than they had heard him laugh for many months—getting up, at the same time, and walking once or twice across the room—Mrs. Aubrey and Miss Aubrey gazed at each other for a few moments, without speaking a word; and you could not have told whether their fair countenances showed more of amusement or of disgust at the intelligence. “Well! it is as I have often told you, Kate,” commenced Mr. Aubrey, after a while resuming his seat, and addressing his sister with an air of good humoured raillery; “You’ve lost your chance—you’ve held your head so high. Ah, ’tis all over now—and our fair cousin is mistress of Yatton!”

“Indeed, Charles,” quoth Kate earnestly, “I do think it’s too painful a subject for a joke.” “Why, Kate!—you must bear it as well——” “Pho, pho—nonsense, Charles! To be serious—did you ever hear anything so shocking as——” “Do you mean to tell me, Kate,” commenced her brother, assuming suddenly such a serious air as for a moment imposed on his sister, “that to become mistress of dear old Yatton—which was *offered* to you, you know—you would not have consented, when it came to the point, to become—Mrs. Titmouse?” For an instant, Kate looked as if she would have made, in the eye of the statuary, an exquisite model of beautiful disdain—provoked by the bare idea even, and put forward, as she knew, in raillery only. “You know, Charles,” said she at length calmly, her features relaxing into a smile, “that if such a wretch had ten thousand Yattons, I would, rather than marry him—oh!”—she shuddered—“spring from Dover cliff into the sea!”

“Ah, Kate, Kate!” exclaimed her brother, with a look of infinite pride and fondness. “Even supposing for a moment that you had no prev——” “Come, Charles, no more nonsense,” said Kate, patting his cheek, and slightly colouring. “I say, that even if——” “Only fancy,” interrupted Kate, “*Lady Cecilia*

—Titmouse! I see her before me now. Well, I protest it is positively insufferable; I could not have thought that there was a woman in the whole world—why”—she paused and added laughingly, “how I should like to see their correspondence!”

“What!” said Mrs. Aubrey, with a sly smile, first at her husband, and then at Kate, “as a model for a certain *other* correspondence that I can imagine—eh, Kate!” “Nonsense, nonsense, Agnes!—what a provoking humour you are both in this evening,” interrupted Kate, with a slight pettishness; “what we’ve heard makes *me* melancholy enough, I assure you!” “I suppose that about the same time that Lady Cecilia Titmouse goes to court,” said her brother, “so will the Honourable Mrs. Dela——” “If you choose to tease me, Charles, of course I cannot help it,” quoth Kate, colouring still more; but it required no *very* great acuteness to detect that the topic was not excessively offensive. “Mrs. De——” “Have done, Charles!” said she, rising; and, putting her arm round his neck, she pressed her fair hand on his mouth; but he pushed it aside laughingly. “Mrs. De—Dela—Delamere,” he continued. “I will finish it for you, Charles,” said Mrs. Aubrey, “the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Delamere——”. “What do *you* turn against me too?” inquired Kate laughing very good-humouredly.

“I wonder what her stately ladyship’s feelings were,” said Aubrey, after a pause, “the first time that her elegant and accomplished lover *saluted* her!!” “Eugh!” exclaimed both Kate and Mrs. Aubrey, in a breath, and with a simultaneous shudder of disgust.

“I dare say poor old Lord Dreddlington’s notion is, that this will be a fine opportunity for bringing about his favourite scheme of *reuniting the families*—Heaven save the mark!” said Mr. Aubrey, just as the twopenny postman’s knock at the door was heard; and within a few moments’ time the servant brought up-stairs a letter addressed to Mr. Aubrey. The very first glance at its contents expelled the smile from his countenance, and the colour from his cheek: he turned, in fact, so pale, that Mrs. Aubrey and Kate also changed colour—and came and stood with beating hearts, and suddenly suspended breath, one on each side of him, looking over the letter while he was reading it. As I intend presently to lay a copy of it before the reader, I shall first state a few circumstances, which will make it appear that this letter may be compared to a shell thrown into a peaceful little citadel, by a skilful, though distant and unseen engineer—in short, I mean Mr. Gammon.

CHAPTER XXV.

THIS astute and determined person had long been bent upon securing one object—namely, access to Mr. Aubrey’s family circle, for reasons which have been already communicated to the reader. That Mr. Aubrey was, at all events, by no means *anxious* for such a favour, had been long before abundantly manifest to Gammon, and yet not in a way to give him any legitimate or excusable grounds of offence. The Aubreys had, he acknowledged, and especially in their present circumstances, an unquestionable right to receive or reject, as they thought fit, any overtures to acquaintance. Nothing, he felt, could be more unexceptionally courteous than Mr. Aubrey’s demeanour; yet had it been such as to satisfy him, that unless he resorted to some means of unusual efficacy, he never could get upon visiting terms with the Aubreys. The im-

pression which Miss Aubrey had originally produced in his mind, remained as distinct and vivid as ever. Her beauty, her grace, her elevated character (of which he had heard much on all hands), her accomplishments, her high birth—all were exquisitely appreciated by him, and conspired to constitute a prize, for the gaining of which he deemed no exertion too great, no enterprise too hazardous. He had, moreover, other most important objects in view, to which a union with Miss Aubrey was in fact essential. She was, again, the only person, the sight of whom had in any measure given vitality to his marble heart, exciting totally new thoughts and desires, such as stimulated him to a fierce and inflexible determination to succeed in his purposes. He was, in short, prepared to make almost any sacrifice, to wait any length of time, to do or suffer anything that man could do or suffer, whether derogatory to his personal honour or not—in order either to secure the affections of Miss Aubrey, or, at all events, her consent to a union with him. Having early discovered the spot where Mr. Aubrey had fixed his residence, Mr. Gammon had made a point of lying in wait on a Sunday morning, for the purpose of discovering the church to which they went; and having succeeded, he became a constant, an impassioned, though an unseen observer of Miss Aubrey, from whom he seldom removed his eyes during the service. But this was to him a highly unsatisfactory state of things: he seemed, in fact, not to have made, nor to be likely to make, the least progress towards the accomplishment of his wishes, though much time had already passed away. He was so deeply engrossed with the affairs of Titmouse—which required his presence very frequently at Yatton, and a great deal of his attention in town—as to prevent his taking any decisive steps for some time in the matter nearest his heart. At length, not having seen or heard anything of Mr. Aubrey for some weeks, during which he—Gammon—had been in town, he resolved on a new stroke of policy.

“Mr. Quirk,” said he one day to his excellent senior partner, “I fancy you will say that I am come to flatter you; but, Heaven knows! if there is a man on the earth with whom I lay aside disguise, that man is my friend Mr. Quirk. Really, it does seem, and mortifying enough it is to own it, as if events invariably showed that you are right—and I wrong”—(Here Mr. Quirk’s appearance might have suggested the idea of a great old tom-cat who is rubbed down the right way of the fur, and does everything he can to testify the delight it gives him, by pressing against the person who affords him such gratification),—“especially in financial matters——”

“Ah, Gammon, Gammon! you’re really past finding out!—Sometimes, now, I declare I fancy you the very keenest dog going in such matters, and at other times, eh?—not *particularly* brilliant. When you’ve seen as much of this world’s villainy, Gammon, as I have, you’ll find it as necessary as I have found it, to lay aside one’s—one’s I say, to lay aside all scrup—that is—I mean—one’s *fine feelings*, and so forth: you understand, Gammon?” “Perfectly, Mr. Quirk——” “Well—and may I ask, Gammon, what is the particular occasion of that screwed-up forehead of yours? Something in the wind?”

“Only this, Mr. Quirk—I begin to suspect that I did very wrong in recommending you to give an indefinite time to that Mr. Aubrey for payment of the heavy balance he owes us—by Heavens!—see how coolly he treats us!”

“Indeed, Gammon, I think so!—Besides—*’tis* an uncommon heavy balance to owe so long, eh?—Fifteen hundred pounds, or thereabouts? ‘Gad! it’s *that*, at least!”—Gammon shrugged his shoulders and bowed, as resigned to any step which Mr. Quirk might think proper to take.

“He’s a villainous proud fellow, that Aubrey, eh?—Your swell debtors generally *are*, though—when they’ve got a bit of a hardship to harp upon——”

“Certainly we ought, when we had him in our power——” “Ah!—D’ye

recollect, Gammon? the *thumbscrew*? eh? whose fault was it that it wasn't put on? eh? Tell me that, friend Gammon! Are you coming round to old Caleb Quirk's matter-of-fact way of doing business? Depend on't, the old boy has got a trick or two left in him yet, grey as his hair's grown." "I bow, my dear sir—I own myself worsted—and all through that absurd weakness I have, which some choose to call——"

"Oh Lord, Gammon! Bubble, bubble and botheration—ah, ha!—Come, there's nobody here but you and me—and eh! *old Bogy* perhaps—so, why that little bit of blarney?"

"Oh! my dear Mr. Quirk, spare me that cutting irony of yours. Surely when I have made the sincere and humiliating submission to which you have been listening—but, to return to business. I assure you that I think we ought not to lose a moment in getting in our balance, or at least coming to some satisfactory and definite arrangement concerning it. Only pinch him, and he'll bleed freely, depend on it."

"Ah, ha! Pinch him, and he'll bleed! That's *my* thunder, Gammon, ah, ha, ha!—By Jove! that's it to a T!—I always thought the fellow had blood enough in him if we only squeezed him a little. So let Snap be off and have a writ out against Master Aubrey."

"Forgive me, my dear Mr. Quirk," interrupted Gammon blandly—"we must go very cautiously to work, or we shall only injure ourselves, and prejudice our most important—and *permanent* interests. We must take care not to drive him desperate, poor devil, or make him take the benefit of the act, and ——" "What a cursed scamp he would be to ——" "Certainly; but *we* should suffer more than he ——" "Surely, Gammon, they'd *remand* him! Eighteen months at the very least." "Not an hour—not a minute, Mr. Quirk," said Gammon, very earnestly. "The deuce they wouldn't? Well, Law's come to a pretty point! And so lenient as we've been!"

"What occurs to *me* as the best method of procedure," said Gammon, after musing for a moment—"is, for you to write a letter to him immediately—civil but peremptory—just one of those letters of yours, my dear sir, in which no man living can excel you—*suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*, Mr. Quirk."

"Gammon, you're a gentleman, every inch of you—you are, upon my soul! If there *is* one thing in which I —— but *you're* a hand at a letter of that sort, too! And *you* have managed these people hitherto; why not go on to the end of the chapter?"

"Mr. Quirk, I look upon this letter as rather an important one—it ought to come from the head of the firm, and to be decisively and skilfully expressed, so as at once to —— eh? but you know exactly what ought to be done."

"Well—leave it to me,—leave it to me, Gammon: I think I *do* know how to draw up a teaser—egad! You can just cast your eye over it as soon as ——"

"If I return in time from Clerkenwell, I will, Mr. Quirk," replied Gammon, who had, however, determined not to disable himself from saying with literal truth that he had not seen one line of the letter which might be sent! and, moreover, resolving to make his appearance at Mr. Aubrey's almost immediately after he should, in the course of the post, have received Mr. Quirk's letter—with every appearance and *expression* of distress, agitation, and even disgust; indignantly assuring Mr. Aubrey that the letter had been sent without Mr. Gammon's knowledge—against his will—and was entirely repudiated by him; and that he would take care, at all hazards to himself, to frustrate any designs on the part of his coarse and hard-hearted senior partner to harass or oppress Mr. Aubrey. With this explanation of precedent circumstances, I proceed to lay before the reader an exact copy of that old cat's-paw, Mr. Quirk's, letter to Mr. Aubrey, the arrival of which had produced the sensation I have already intimated.

"Saffron Hill,

"30th September, 18 —.

"SIR,—We trust you will excuse our reminding you of the very large balance (£1,446 14s. 6d.) still remaining due upon our account—and which we understood, at the time when the very favourable arrangement to you, with respect to Mr. Titmouse, was made, was to have been long before this liquidated. Whatever allowances we might have felt disposed, on account of your peculiar situation, to have made (and which we *have* made), we cannot but feel a little surprised at your having allowed several months to elapse without making any allusion thereto. We are satisfied, however, that you require only to be reminded thereof, to have your immediate attention directed thereto, and to act in that way that will conduce to liquidate our very heavy balance against you. We are sorry to have to press you; but being much pressed ourselves with serious outlays, we are obliged to throw ourselves (however reluctantly) upon our resources; and it gives us pleasure to anticipate, that you must by this time have made those arrangements that will admit of your immediate attention of our over-due account, and that will render unnecessary our resorting to hostile and compulsory proceedings of that extremely painful description that we have always felt extremely reluctant to, particularly with those gentlemen that would feel it very disagreeable. We trust that in a week's time we shall hear from you to that effect, that will render unnecessary our proceeding to extremities against you, which would be extremely painful to us.—We remain, sir, yours most obediently,

"QUIRK, GAMMON, & SNAP.

"CHARLES AUBREY, ESQ.

"P.S.—We should have no objection, if it would materially relieve you, to take your note of hand for the aforesaid balance (£1,446 14s. 6d.) at two months, with interest, and good security. Or say, £800 down in two months and a *warrant of attorney* for the remainder, at two months more."

As soon as all three of them had finished reading the above letter, in the way I have described, Mrs. Aubrey threw her arms round her silent and oppressed husband's neck, and Kate, her bosom heaving with agitation, returned to her seat without uttering a word.

"My darling Charles;" faltered Mrs. Aubrey, and wept.

"Never mind, Charles—let us hope that we shall get through even *this*," commenced Kate; when her emotion prevented her proceeding. Mr. Aubrey appeared to cast his eye again, but mechanically only, over the dry, civil, heart-breaking letter.

"Don't distress yourself, my Agnes," said he tenderly, placing her beside him, with his arm round her—"It is only reasonable that these people should ask for what is their own; and if their manner is a little coarse——"

"Oh, I've no patience, Charles!—It's the letter of a vulgar, hard-hearted fellow," sobbed Mrs. Aubrey.

"Yes—they are wretches!—cruel harpies!" quoth Kate passionately, wiping her eyes—"they know that you have almost beggared yourself to pay off by far the greater part of their abominable bill; and that you are slaving day and night to enable you to——" here her agitation was so excessive as to prevent her uttering another word.

"I must write and tell them," said Aubrey calmly, but with a countenance laden with gloom—"It is all I can do—but if they will *have patience with me*, *I will pay them all*."

"Oh, they'll put you in prison, Charles, directly"—said Kate passionately; and rising, she threw herself into his arms, and kissed him with a sort of frantic energy. "We're *very* miserable, Charles—are not we? It's very hard

to bear indeed," she continued, gazing with agonizing intensity on his troubled features. Mrs. Aubrey wept in silence.

"Are you giving way, my brave Kate, with this sudden and momentary gust on the midnight sea of our trouble?" inquired her brother, proudly but kindly gazing at her, and with his hand gently pushing from her pale cheeks her disordered hair.

"Human nature, Charles, must not be tried too far—look at Agnes, the darling little loves——"

"I am not likely to consult their interests, Kate, by yielding to unmanly emotion—am I, sweet Agnes?" She made him no reply, but shook her head, sobbing bitterly.

"Pray what do you think, Charles, of your friend *Mr. Gammon*, now?" inquired Kate, suddenly and scornfully. "Oh, the smooth-tongued villain! I've always hated him."

"I must say there's something about his eye that is anything but pleasing," said Mrs. Aubrey; "and so I thought when I saw him at York for a moment."

"He's a hypocrite, Charles—depend upon it; and in this letter he has thrown off the mask"—interrupted Kate.

"Is it *his* letter? How do we know that he had anything to do with it?" inquired her brother calmly—"It is much more probable that it is the production of old Mr. Quirk alone, for whom Mr. Gammon has, I know, a profound contempt. The handwriting is Mr. Quirk's; the style is assuredly not Mr. Gammon's, and the whole tone of the letter is such as makes me confident that neither was the composition of the letter, nor the idea of sending it, his; besides, he has really shown on every occasion a straightforward and disinterested——"

"Oh, Charles, it is very weak of you to be so taken with such a man; he's a *horrid* fellow; I can't bear to think of him! One of these days, Charles, you'll be of my opinion!"—whilst she thus spoke, and whilst Mrs. Aubrey was, with a trembling hand, preparing tea, a double knock was heard at the street door.

"Gracious, Charles! who can that possibly be, and at this time of night?" exclaimed Kate with alarmed energy.

"I really cannot conjecture"—replied Mr. Aubrey, with no little agitation of manner, which he found it impossible to conceal—we've certainly but very few visitors, and so late." The servant in a few minutes terminated their suspense, and occasioned them nearly equal alarm and amazement, by laying down on the table a card bearing the name of MR. GAMMON.

"Mr. Gammon!" exclaimed all three in a breath, looking apprehensively at each other—"Is he *alone*?" inquired Mr. Aubrey, with forced calmness. "Yes, sir." "Show him into the parlour, then," replied Mr. Aubrey, "and say I will be with him in a few moments' time."

"Dear Charles, don't, dearest, think of going down," said his wife and sister, with excessive alarm and agitation, "desire him to send up his message." "No, I shall go and see him, and at once," replied Mr. Aubrey, taking one of the candles. "For Heaven's sake, Charles, mind what you say to the man; he will watch every word you utter. And, dearest, don't stay long; consider what tortures we shall be in!" said poor Mrs. Aubrey, accompanying him to the door.

"Rely on my prudence, and also that I shall not stop long," he replied; and descending the stairs, he entered the study. In a chair near the little book-strewn table sat his dreaded visitor, who, instantly, on seeing Mr. Aubrey, rose, with distress and agitation visible in his countenance and deportment. Mr. Aubrey with calmness and dignity, begged him to resume his seat; and when he had done so, sat down opposite to him, with a sternly inquisitive look,

awaiting his visitor's errand, who did not keep him long in suspense. For—"Oh, Mr. Aubrey!" commenced Mr. Gammon, with a somewhat tremulous voice, "I perceive, from your manner, that my fears are justified, and that I am an intruder—a dishonourable and hypocritical one I must indeed appear; but, as one gentleman with another, I request you to hear me. This visit appears indeed unseasonable; but, late this afternoon, I made a discovery which has shocked me severely, nay, I may say, disgusted me beyond expression. Am I right, Mr. Aubrey, in supposing that this evening you have received a letter from Mr. Quirk, and about the balance due on our account?" "Yes, sir," replied Mr. Aubrey, coldly. "I thought as much," muttered Gammon with suppressed vehemence—"execrable, heartless, sordid old—And he *knew*," continued Gammon, addressing Mr. Aubrey in an indignant tone, "that my word was pledged to you that it should be long before you were troubled about the business."

"I have nothing to complain of, sir," said Mr. Aubrey, eyeing his agitated companion (who *felt* that he was) searchingly.

"But I have, Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon haughtily. "My senior partner has broken faith with me. Sir, you have already paid more than will cover what is justly due to us; and I recommend you, after this, to *have the bill taxed*. I do, sir, and thereby you will get rid of every farthing of the balance now demanded." Notwithstanding the air of sincerity with which this was uttered, a cold thrill of apprehension and suspicion passed through Mr. Aubrey's heart, and he felt confident that some subtle and dangerous manoeuvre was being practised upon him—some hostile step urged upon him, for instance—which would be unsuccessful, and yet afford a pretext to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap to treat him as one guilty of a breach of faith, and warrant them in proceeding to extremities.

"I have no intention, sir, to do anything of the kind," said he—"the original agreement between us was, that your bill should not be taxed. I adhere to it; and whatever course you may feel disposed to take, I shall take no steps whatever of the kind you mention. At the same time it is utterly impossible for me to pay——"

"Mr. Aubrey!" interrupted Gammon, imploringly.

"And what you intend to do, for Heaven's sake, sir, do quickly, and do not keep me in suspense."

"I perceive, Mr. Aubrey, that I am distrusted," said Gammon, with a somewhat proud and peremptory tone and manner—"I excuse it; you are justly irritated, and have been insulted; so have I, too, sir; and I choose to tell you, upon my sacred word of honour as a gentleman, that I entirely disown and scout this whole procedure; that I never knew anything about it till, accidentally, I discovered lying on Mr. Quirk's desk, after his departure this evening from the office, a rough draft of a letter which I presumed you had received, especially as, on a strict inquiry of the clerks, I found that a letter had been put into the post, addressed to you. Nay, more; Mr. Quirk, whose rapacity increases—I grieve to own—with his years, has been for many weeks harassing me about this detestable business and urging me to consent, but, in vain, to such an application as he has now meanly made behind my back, regardless of the injury it was calculated to do my feelings, and, indeed, the doubt it must throw over my sincerity and honour. Only a fortnight ago, he solemnly pledged himself never to mention the matter to either me or you again, for at least a couple of years, unless something extraordinary should intervene. If the letter you have received is a transcript of the rough draft which I have read, it is a vulgar, unfeeling letter, and contains two or three wilfully false statements. I therefore feel it due to myself to disavow all participation in this truly unworthy affair; and if you still distrust me, I can

only regret it, but shall not presume to find fault with you for it. I am half disposed, on account of this, and one or two other things which have happened, to close my connection with Mr. Quirk from this day—for ever. He and I have nothing in common; and the kind of business which he prefers is perfectly odious to me. But if I should continue in the firm, I will undertake to supply you with one pretty conclusive evidence of my sincerity and truth in what I have been saying to you—namely, that on the faith and honour of a gentleman, you may depend upon hearing no more on this matter from any member of our firm. Let the *event*, Mr. Aubrey, speak for itself.”—While Gammon was speaking with great earnestness and fervour, he had felt Mr. Aubrey’s eye fixed on him with an expression of stern incredulity—which, however, he at length perceived with infinite inward relief and pleasure, to be giving way as he went on.

“Certainly, Mr. Gammon”—said Mr. Aubrey, when Gammon had ceased—“the letter you have mentioned, has occasioned me—and my family—very great distress; for it is utterly out of my power to comply with its requisitions: and if it be intended to be really acted on, and followed up”—he paused, and successfully concealed his emotion, “all my little plans are for ever frustrated—and I am at your mercy—to go to prison, if you choose, and there end my days.”—He paused—his lip trembled, and his eyes were for a moment obscured with starting tears. So also was it with Mr. Gammon. “But,”—resumed Mr. Aubrey,—“after the explicit and voluntary assurance which you have given me, I feel it impossible not to believe you entirely. I can imagine no motive for what would be otherwise such elaborate deception.”

“*Motive*, Mr. Aubrey! The only motive I am conscious of, is one resting on profound sympathy for your misfortunes—admiration of your character—and aiming at your speedy extrication from your very serious embarrassments. I am in the habit, Mr. Aubrey,” he continued in a low tone, “of concealing and checking my feelings—but there *are* occasions”—he paused, and added with a somewhat faltering voice—“Mr. Aubrey, it pains me inexpressibly to observe that your anxieties—your severe exertions—I trust in God I may not rightly add, your *privations*—are telling on your appearance. You are certainly much thinner.” It was impossible any longer to distrust the sincerity of Mr. Gammon—to withstand the arts of this consummate actor. Mr. Aubrey held out long, but at length surrendered entirely, and yielded implicit credence to all that Gammon had said—entertaining, moreover, feelings of gratitude towards one who had done so much to protect him from rapacious avarice, and the ruin into which it would have precipitated him; and of respect for one who had evinced such a sensitive jealousy for his own honour and reputation, and resolute determination to vindicate it against suspicion. Subsequent conversation served to strengthen his favourable disposition towards Gammon, and the same effect was also produced when he adverted to his previous and unwarrantable distrust and disbelief of that gentleman. He looked fatigued and harassed; it was growing late; he had come on his errand of courtesy and kindness, a great distance: why should not Mr. Aubrey ask him up-stairs, to join them at tea? To be sure, Mr. Aubrey had hitherto felt a disinclination—he scarce knew why—to have any more than mere business intercourse with Mr. Gammon, a member of such a firm as Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—and, moreover, Mr. Runnington had more than once let fall expressions indicative of vehement distrust of Mr. Gammon; so had the Attorney-General; but what had Gammon’s *conduct* been? Had it not practically given the lie to such insinuations and distrust, unless Mr. Aubrey was to own himself incapable of forming a judgment on a man’s line of conduct which had been so closely watched as that of Gammon by himself, Aubrey? Then Miss Aubrey had ever, and especially that very evening—expressed a vehement dislike

of Mr. Gammon—avowed, also, her early and uniform distrust—'twould be extremely embarrassing to her suddenly to introduce into her presence such an individual as Gammon : again, he had promised to return quickly, in order to relieve their anxiety : why should he not have the inexpressible gratification of letting Mr. Gammon himself, in his own pointed and impressive manner, dispel all their fears ? He would, probably, not stay long.

"Mr. Gammon," said he, having balanced for some minutes these conflicting considerations in his mind—"there are only Mrs. Aubrey and my sister upstairs. I am sure they will be happy to see me return to them in time for tea, accompanied by the bearer of such agreeable tidings as yours. For Mr. Quirk's letter, to be frank, reached me when in their presence, and we all read it together, and were dreadfully disturbed at its contents." After a faint show of reluctance to trespass on the ladies so suddenly, and at so late an hour, Mr. Gammon slipped off his great-coat, and, with intense but suppressed feelings of exultation at the success of his scheme, followed Mr. Aubrey up-stairs. He felt not a little fluttered on entering the room and catching a first glimpse of the two lovely women—and one of them *Miss Aubrey*—sitting in it, their faces turned with eager interest and anxiety towards the door as he made his appearance. He observed that both of them started, and turned excessively pale.

"Let me introduce to you," said Mr. Aubrey quickly, and with a bright assuring smile, "a gentleman who has kindly called to relieve us all from great anxiety—Mr. Gammon : Mr. Gammon, Mrs. Aubrey—Miss Aubrey." He bowed with an air of deep deference, but easy self-possession ; his soul thrilling within him at the sight of her whose image had never been from before his eyes since they had first seen her.

"I shall trespass on you for only a few minutes, ladies, said he, approaching the chair towards which he was motioned. "I could not resist the opportunity so politely afforded me by Mr. Aubrey of paying my compliments here, and personally assuring you of my utter abhorrence of the mercenary and oppressive conduct of a gentleman with whom, alas ! I am closely connected in business, and whose letter to you of this evening I only casually became acquainted with a few moments before starting off hither. Forget it, ladies ; I pledge my honour that it shall *never be acted on !*" This he said with a fervour of manner that could not but make an impression on those whom he addressed.

"I'm sure we're happy to see you, Mr. Gammon, and very much obliged to you, indeed," said Mrs. Aubrey, with a sweet smile, and a face from which alarm was vanishing fast. Miss Aubrey said nothing ; her brilliant eyes glanced with piercing anxiety, now at her brother, then at his companion. Gammon felt that he was distrusted. Nothing could be more prepossessing—more bland and insinuating, without a trace of fulsomeness, than his manner and address, as he took his seat between Mrs. Aubrey and Miss Aubrey, whose paleness rather suddenly gave way to a vivid and beautiful flush ; and her eyes presently sparkled with delighted surprise on perceiving the relieved air of her brother, and the apparent cordiality and sincerity of Mr. Gammon. When she reflected, moreover, on her expressions of harshness and severity concerning him that very evening, and of which he now appeared so undeserving, it threw into her manner towards him a sort of delicate and charming embarrassment. Her ear drank in eagerly every word he uttered—so pointed, so significant, so full of earnest goodwill towards her brother. His manner was that of a gentleman, his countenance and conversation that of a man of intellect ;—was *this* the keen and cruel pettifogger whom she had learned at once to dread and to despise ? They and he were, in a word, completely at their ease with one another, within a few minutes after he had taken his seat

at the tea-table. Miss Aubrey's beauty shone that evening with even unwonted lustre, and appeared as if it had not been in the least impaired by the anguish of mind which she had so long suffered. 'Tis quite impossible for me to do justice to the expression of her full beaming blue eyes—an expression of mingled passion and intellect—of blended softness and spirit, that, especially in conjunction with the rich tones of her voice, shed something like madness into the breast of Gammon. She, as well as her lovely sister-in-law, was dressed in mourning, which infinitely set off her dazzling complexion, and, simple and elegant in its drapery, displayed her exquisite proportions to the greatest possible advantage. "Oh, my God!" thought Gammon, with a momentary thrill of disgust and horror; "and this is the transcendent creature of whom that little miscreant, Titmouse, spoke to me in terms of such presumptuous and revolting license!" What would he not have given to kiss the fair and delicate white hand that passed to him his teacup! Then Gammon's thoughts turned for a moment inward—*why, what a scoundrel he was!* At that instant he was, as it were, reeking with his recent lie. He was there on cruel, false pretences, which alone had secured him access into that little drawing-room; he was a fiend beside an angel. What an execrable hypocrite was he! He caught, on that memorable occasion, a glimpse even of his own infernal *selfishness*—a sight that gave him a cold shudder. Then, was he not in the presence of his *victims*?—of those whom he was fast pressing on to the verge of destruction—to whom he was, at that moment, meditating subtle schemes of mischief! At length they all got into animated conversation. He was charmed by the simplicity and frankness of their manners, yet he felt a sad and painful consciousness of not having made the least way with them; though physically near to them, he seemed yet really at an unapproachable distance from them, and particularly from Miss Aubrey. He felt that the courtesy bestowed upon him was accidental, the result merely of his present position, and of the intelligence which he had come to communicate; it was not *personal*—'twas nothing to *Gammon himself*; it would never be renewed, unless he should renew his device. They were still the Aubreys of Yatton, and he, in their presence, still Mr. Gammon of the firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, of Saffron Hill—and all this on the part of the Aubreys without the least effort, the least intention, or consciousness. No, there had not been exhibited towards him the faintest indication of hauteur. On the contrary, he had been treated with perfect cordiality and frankness. Yet, dissatisfaction and vexation were, he scarce knew at the moment why, completely *flooding* him. Had he accurately analysed his own feelings, he would have discovered the real cause to have been—*his own unreasonable, unjustifiable wishes and intentions*. They talked of Titmouse, and his mode of life and conduct—of his expected alliance with the Lady Cecilia, at the mention of which Gammon's quick eye detected a passing smile of scorn on Miss Aubrey's countenance, that was death to all his own fond and ambitious hopes. After he had been sitting with them for scarcely an hour, he detected Miss Aubrey stealthily glancing at her watch, and at once arose to take his departure, with a very easy and graceful air, expressing an apprehension that he had trespassed upon their kindness. He was cordially assured to the contrary, but invited, neither to prolong his stay, nor renew his visit. Miss Aubrey made him, he thought, as he inclined towards her, *rather* a formal curtesy; and the tone of voice—soft and silvery—in which she said "Good night, Mr. Gammon," fell on his eager ear, and sank into his vexed heart, like music. On quitting the house, a deep sigh of disappointment escaped him. As he gazed for a moment with longing eyes at the windows of the room in which Miss Aubrey was sitting, he felt profound depression of spirit; he had altogether *failed*; and he had a sort of cursed consciousness that he deserved to fail, on every

account. Her image was before his mind's eye every moment while he was threading his way back to his chambers at Thavies' Inn; he sat for an hour or two before the remnant of his fire, lost in a reverie; and sleep came not to his eyes till a late hour in the morning. Just as his tortuous mind was loosing hold of its sinister purposes in sleep, Mr. Aubrey might have been seen taking his seat in his little study, having spent a restless night. 'Twas little more than half-past four o'clock when he entered, candle in hand, the scene of his early and cheerful labours, and took his seat before his table covered with loose manuscripts and books. His face was certainly overcast with anxiety, but his soul was calm and resolute. Having lit his fire, he placed his candle on the table, and, leaning back for a moment in his chair, while the flickering increasing light of his crackling fire and candle revealed to him, with a sense of snugness, his shelves crammed with books, and the window covered with an ample crimson curtain, effectually excluding the chill morning air—he reflected with a heavy sigh upon the precarious tenure by which he held the little comforts that were yet left to him. Oh!—thought he—if Heaven were but to relieve me from the frightful pressure of liability under which I am bound to the earth, what labour, what privation, would I repine at! What gladness would not spring up in my heart! But rousing himself from vain thoughts of this kind, he began to arrange his manuscripts, when his ear caught a sound on the stair—'twas the light step of his sister, coming down to perform her promised undertaking—not an unusual one by any means—to transcribe for the press the manuscript he was about completing that morning. "My sweet Kate," said he tenderly, as she entered with her little chamber light, which she extinguished as she entered—"I am really grieved to see you stirring so early—go back to bed." But she kissed his cheek affectionately, and refused to do any such thing; and telling him of the restless night she had passed, of which indeed her pale features bore but too legible evidence, she sat herself down in her accustomed place, nearly opposite to him, cleared away space enough for her little desk, and then opening it, was presently engaged in her delightful task—for to her it *was* indeed delightful—of copying out her brother's composition. Thus she sat, silent and industrious—scarce opening her lips, except to ask him to explain an illegible word or so, till the hour had arrived—eight o'clock—for the close of their morning toil. The reader will be pleased to hear that the article on which they had been engaged—and which was on a question of foreign politics, of great difficulty and importance—produced him a cheque for sixty guineas, and excited very general attention and admiration.

As I do not intend to occupy the reader with any details relating to Mr. Aubrey's Temple avocations, I shall content myself with saying that the more Mr. Weasel and Mr. Aubrey came to know of each other, the more Aubrey respected his legal knowledge and ability, and he, Aubrey's intellectual energy and successful application, which, indeed, consciously brought home to Aubrey its own reward, in the daily acquisition of solid learning, and increasing facility in the use of it. His mind was formed for things, and was not apt to occupy itself with mere words, or technicalities. He was ever in quest of the principles of law, its reason, and spirit. He quickly began to appreciate the sound practical good sense on which almost all the rules of law are founded, and the effectual manner in which they are accommodated to the innumerable and ever-varying exigencies of human affairs. The mere forms and technicalities of the law, Mr. Aubrey often compared to shorthand, whose characters to the uninitiated appear quaint and useless, but are perfectly invaluable to him who has seen the object, and patiently acquired the use of them. Whatever Mr. Aubrey's hand found to do, while studying the law, he did it, indeed, with his might—which is the grand secret of the difference in the success of different

persons addressing themselves to legal studies. He frequently surprised Mr. Weasel with the exactness and extent of his legal information—his acuteness, clearheadedness, and tenacity in dealing with matters of downright difficulty—and Mr. Weasel had several times, in consultation, an opportunity of expressing his very flattering opinion concerning Mr. Aubrey to the Attorney-General. The mention of that eminent person reminds me of an observation which I intended to have made some time ago. The reader is not to imagine, from my silence upon the subject, that Mr. Aubrey, in his fallen fortunes, was heartlessly forgotten or neglected by the distinguished friends and associates of former and more prosperous days. It was not they that withdrew from him, but he that withdrew from them; and that, too, of set purpose, resolutely adhered to, on the ground that it could not be otherwise, without seriously interfering with the due prosecution of those plans of life on which were dependent not only his all, and that of those connected with him—but his fond hopes of yet extricating himself, by his own personal exertions, from the difficulties and dangers which at present environed him. The Attorney-General frequently called to inquire how he was getting on; and, let me not forget here to state a fact which I conceive infinitely to redound to poor Aubrey's honour—viz., that he thrice refused offers made him from very high quarters, of considerable *sinecures*, i.e., handsome salaries for purely nominal services—which he was earnestly and repeatedly reminded would at once afford him a liberal maintenance, and leave the whole of his time at his own disposal, to follow any pursuit or profession which he chose. Mr. Aubrey justly considered that it was very difficult, if not indeed impossible, for any honourable and high-minded man to be a sinecurist. He that holds a sinecure, is, in my opinion, plundering the public; and how it is more contrary to the dictates of honour and justice, deliberately to defraud an individual, than deliberately and audaciously to defraud that collection of individuals called the public, let casuists determine. As for Mr. Aubrey, he saw stretching before him the clear, straight, bright line of honour, and he resolved to follow it, without faltering or wavering, come what come might. He resolved, with the blessing of Providence, that his own exertions should procure his bread, and, if such was the will of Heaven, lead him to distinction among mankind. He had formed this determination, and resolved to work it out—never to pause or give way, but to die in the struggle.

Mr. Gammon felt very little difficulty in putting off Mr. Quirk from his purpose of enforcing the payment by Mr. Aubrey of the balance of his account; in demonstrating to him the policy of waiting a little longer. He pledged himself, when the proper time came, to adopt measures of undoubted efficacy—assuring his sullen senior in a low tone, that since his letter had reached Mr. Aubrey, circumstances had occurred which would render it in the last degree dangerous to press that gentleman upon the subject. What that was which had happened, Mr. Gammon, as usual, refused to state. This was a considerable source of vexation to the old gentleman: but he had a far greater one, in the decisive and final overthrow of his fondly cherished hopes concerning his daughter's alliance with Titmouse. The paragraph in the *Aurora*, announcing Mr. Titmouse's engagement to his brilliant relative, the Lady Cecilia, had emanated from the pen of Mr. Gammon, who had had several objects in view in giving early publicity to the event he announced in such courtly terms. *Happening*, on the morning on which it appeared, to be glancing over the fascinating columns of the *Aurora* at a public office (the paper taken in at their own establishment being the *Morning Grawl*), he made a point of purchasing that day's *Aurora*; and on returning to Saffron Hill, he inquired whether Mr. Quirk were at home. Hearing that he was sitting alone, in his room—in rushed Mr. Gammon, breathless with surprise and haste, and plucking

the paper out of his pocket—"By heavens, Mr. Quirk!"—he almost gasped as he doubled down the paper to the place where stood the announcement in question, and put it into Mr. Quirk's hands—"this young fellow's given you the slip, after all! See!—The moment that my back is turned——"

Mr. Quirk having, with a little trepidation, adjusted his spectacles, perused the paragraph with a somewhat flushed face. He had, in fact, for some time had grievous misgivings on the subject of his chance of becoming the father-in-law of his distinguished client, Mr. Titmouse; but now his faintest glimmering of hope was suddenly and completely extinguished, and the old gentleman felt quite desolate. He looked up, on finishing the paragraph, and gazed rather ruefully at his indignant and sympathizing companion.

"It seems all up, Gammon, certainly—don't it?" said he, with a flustered air. "Indeed, my dear sir, it does! You have my sincerest——" "Now comes t'other end of the thing, Gammon! You know every promise of marriage has two ends—one joins the heart, and t'other the pocket; *out* heart, *in* pocket—so have at him, by Jove!" He rose up and rubbed his hands as he stood before the fire. "Breach of promise—thundering damages—devilish deep purse—special jury—broken heart, and all that! I wish he'd written her more letters! Adad, I'll have a shot at him by next assizes—a writ on the file this very day! What d'ye think on't, friend Gammon, between ourselves?"

"Why, my dear sir—to tell you the truth—aren't you really well out of it? He's a miserable little upstart—he'd have made a wretched husband for so superior a girl as Miss Quirk."

"Ay—ay! ay! She *is* a good girl, Gammon—there you're right; would have made the best of wives—my eyes (between ourselves!) how that'll go to the jury! Gad, I fancy I see him—perhaps all of 'em daughters of their own."

"Looking at the thing calmly, Mr. Quirk," said Gammon gravely—apprehensive of Mr. Quirk's carrying too far so very absurd an affair—"where's the *evidence* of the promise?—Because, you know, there's certainly *something* depends on that—eh?"

"Evidence? Deuce take you, Gammon! where are your wits? Evidence? Lots—lots of it! A'n't there I—her father? A'n't I a competent witness? Wait and see old Caleb Quirk get into the box. I'll settle his hash in half a minute." "Yes—if you're believed, perhaps." "*Believe* be——! Who's to be believed, if her own father isn't?" "Why, you may be too much swayed by your feelings?" "*Feelings* be ——! It's past all that; he has none—so he must pay, for he *has* cash! He ought to be made an example of!" "Still, to come to the point, Mr. Quirk, I vow it quite *teases* me—this matter of the evidence——" "Evidence? Why, Lord bless my soul, Gammon," quoth Quirk testily, "haven't *you* had your eyes and ears open all this while? Gad, what a crack witness you'd make? A man of your—your intellect—serve a friend at a pinch—and in a matter about his daughter? Ah, how often you've seen 'em together—walking, talking, laughing, dancing, riding—writ in her album—made her presents, and she him. *Evidence?* Oceans of it, and to spare! Secure Subtle—and I wouldn't take £5,000 for my verdict!"

"Why, you see, Mr. Quirk," said Gammon very seriously—"though I've striven my utmost these six months to bring it about, the artful little scamp has never given me the least thing that I could lay hold of, and *swear* to."

"Oh, you'll *recollect* enough, in due time, friend Gammon, if you'll only turn your attention to it; and if you'll bear in mind it's life and death to my poor girl. Oh Lord! I must get my sister to break it to her, and I'll send sealed instructions to Mr. —— Weasel, shall we say? or Lynx? ay, Lynx; for he'll then have to fight for his own pleadings; and can't turn round at the trial and say, 'this is not right,' and 'that's wrong,' and, *why* didn't you have such and such evidence?' Lynx is the man; and I'll lay the venue in Yorkshire, for

Titmouse is devilish disliked down there; and a special jury will be only too glad to give him a desperate slap in the chops! We'll lay the damages at twenty thousand pounds! Ah, ha! I'll teach the young villain to break the hearts of an old man and his daughter. But, egad," he pulled out his watch, "half-past two; and Nicky Crowbar sure to be put up at three! By Jove! it won't do to be out of the way; he's head of the gang, and they always come down very liberally when they're in trouble! Snap! Amminadab! hollo! who's there? Drat them all, why don't they speak?" The old gentleman was soon, however, attended to.

"Are they here?" he inquired, as Mr. Amminadab entered. "Yes, sir, all three; and the coach is at the door, too. Nicky Crowbar's to be up at three, sir——" "I see—I know—I'm ready," replied Mr. Quirk, who was presently seated in the coach with three gentlemen, to whom he minutely explained the person of Mr. Nicky Crowbar, and the place at which it was quite certain that Mr. Crowbar could *not* have been at half-past eleven on Tuesday night the 9th of July, seeing that he happened at that precise time to be elsewhere, in company with these three gentlemen—to wit, at Chelsea, and *not at Clapham*.

Though Mr. Gammon thus sympathized with one of the gentle beings who had been "rifled of all their sweetness," I grieve to say that the other, Miss Tag-rag, never occupied his thoughts for one moment. He neither knew nor cared whether or not she was apprized of the destruction of all her fond hopes, by the paragraph which had appeared in the *Aurora*. In fact, he felt that he had really done enough, on the part of Mr. Titmouse, for his early friend and patron, Mr. Tag-rag, on whom the stream of fortune had set in strong and steady; and, in short, Mr. Gammon knew that Mr. Tag-rag had received a substantial memento of his connection with Tittlebat Titmouse. In fact, how truly disinterested a man was Mr. Gammon towards all with whom he came in contact! What had he not done, as I have been saying, for the Tag-rags? What for Mr. Titmouse? What for the Earl of Dreddlington? What for Mr. Quirk, and even Snap? As for Mr. Quirk, had he not been put in possession of his long coveted bond for £10,000? of which, by the way, he allotted £1,000 only to the man—Mr. Gammon—by whose unwearying exertions and consummate ability he obtained so splendid a prize, and £300 to Mr. Snap. Then, had not Mr. Quirk also been paid his bill against Titmouse of £5,000 and upwards, and £2,500 by Mr. Aubrey? And, governed by the articles of their partnership, what a *lion's half* of this spoil had not been appropriated to the respectable old head of the firm? Mr. Gammon did undoubtedly complain indignantly of the trifling portion allotted to him, but he was encountered by such a desperate pertinacity on the part of Mr. Quirk as baffled him entirely, and caused him to abandon his further claim in disgust and despair. Thus, the £20,000 obtained by Mr. Titmouse, on mortgage of the Yatton property, was reduced at once to the sum of £5,000;—but out of this handsome balance had yet to come, first, £800, with interest, due to Mr. Quirk for subsistence money advanced to Titmouse; secondly, £500 due to Mr. Snap, for monies alleged to have been also lent by him to his friend Titmouse at different times, in the manner that has been already explained to the reader—Snap's demand for repayment being accompanied by *verbatim* copies of between forty and fifty memoranda—many of them in pencil—notes of hand, receipts, I.O.U.'s, etc., in whose handwriting the figures representing *the sums lent*, and the times when, could not be ascertained, and did not signify; it being, in point of law, good *prima facie* evidence for Snap, in the event of a trial, simply to produce the documents and prove the signature of his friend Mr. Titmouse. Titmouse discharged a volley of imprecations at Snap's head, on receiving this unexpected claim, and referred it to Mr. Gammon; who, after

subjecting it to a *bonâ fide* and very rigorous examination, found it in vain to attempt to resist, or even diminish it; such perfect method and accuracy had Snap observed in his accounts, that they secured him a clear gain of £350; the difference between that sum and £500, being the amount actually and *bonâ fide* advanced by him to Titmouse. Deducting, therefore, £1,300 (the amount of the two minor demands of £800 and £500 above specified), there remained to Mr. Titmouse out of the £20,000 the sum of £3,700; and he ought to have been thankful; for he *might* have got *nothing*,—or even have been brought in debtor to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap.

I say that Mr. Gammon would seem, from the above statement of accounts, not to have been dealt with in any degree adequately to his merits. He felt it so, but soon reconciled himself to it, occupied as he was with arduous and extensive speculations, amidst all the complications of which he never for a moment lost sight of one object, viz.,—*himself*. His schemes were boldly conceived, and he went about the accomplishment of them with equal patience and sagacity. Almost everything was going as he could wish. He had contrived to place himself in a very convenient fast-and-loose sort of position with reference to his fellow-partners—one which admitted of his easily disengaging himself from them, whenever the proper time arrived for taking such a step. He was absolute and paramount over Titmouse, and could always secure his instant submission, by virtue of the fearful and mysterious talisman which he occasionally flashed before his startled eyes. He had acquired great influence, also, over the Earl of Dreddlington—an influence which was constantly on the increase; and had seen come to pass an event which he judged to be of great importance to him—namely, the engagement between Titmouse and the Lady Cecilia. Yet was there one object which he had proposed to himself as incalculably valuable and supremely desirable—as the consummation of all his designs and wishes; I mean the obtaining the hand of Miss Aubrey—and in which he had yet a fearful misgiving of failure. But he was a man whose courage rose with every obstacle; and he fixedly resolved within himself to succeed, at any cost. 'Twas not alone his exquisite appreciation of her personal beauty—her grace, her accomplishments, her lovely temper, her lofty spirit, her high birth—objects all of them dazzling enough to a man of such powerful and ambitious mind, and placed in such circumstances in life as Gammon. There were certain other considerations, intimately involved in all his calculations, which rendered success in this affair a matter of capital importance—nay, indispensable. Knowing, as I do, what had passed, at different times, between that proud and determined girl, and her constant and enthusiastic lover, Mr. Delamere, I am as certain as a man can be of anything that has not actually happened, that, though she may possibly not be fated to become Mrs. Delamere, she will certainly *never* become—Mrs. Gammon. Loving Kate as I do, and being thoroughly acquainted with Gammon, I feel deep interest in his movements, and am watching them with great apprehension:—she, lovely, innocent, unsuspecting; he, subtle, selfish, unscrupulous, desperate! And he has great power in his hands: is he not silently surrounding his destined prey with unperceived but inevitable meshes? God guard thee, my Kate, and reward thy noble devotion to thy brother and his fallen fortunes!

Gammon's reception by the Aubreys, in Vivian Street—kind and courteous though it had surely been—had ever since rankled in his heart. ¶ Their abstaining from a request to him to prolong his stay, or to renew his visit, he had noted at the time, and had ever since reflected upon with pique and discouragement. Nevertheless, he was resolved, at all hazards, to become at least an occasional visitor in Vivian Street. When a fortnight had elapsed without any further intimation to Mr. Aubrey concerning the dreaded balance

due to the firm, Gammon ventured to call in, for the purpose of assuring Mr. Aubrey that it was no mere temporary lull; that he might divest his mind of all uneasiness on the subject; and of asking whether he (Gammon) had not told Mr. Aubrey truly that he both could and would restrain the hand of Mr. Quirk. Could Mr. Aubrey be otherwise than grateful for such active and manifestly disinterested kindness? Again Gammon made his appearance at Mrs. Aubrey's tea-table—and was again received with all the sweetness and frankness of manner which he had formerly experienced from her and Miss Aubrey. Again he called, on some adroit pretext or another—and once heard Miss Aubrey's rich voice and exquisite performance on the piano. He became subject to emotions and impulses of a sort that he had never before experienced; yet, whenever she retired from their fascinating society, he felt an aching void, as it were, within—he perceived the absence of all sympathy towards him; he felt indignant—but that did not quench the ardour of his aspirations. 'Tis hardly necessary to say, that on every occasion, Gammon effectually concealed the profound and agitated feelings which the sight of Miss Aubrey called forth in him; and what a tax was this upon his powers of concealment and self-control! How he laid himself out to amuse and interest them all! With what racy humour would he describe the vulgar absurdities of Titmouse—the stately eccentricities of the Dreddlingtons! With what eager and breathless interest was he listened to! No man could make himself more unexceptionably agreeable than Gammon; and the ladies really took pleasure in his society; Kate about as far from any notion of the real state of his feelings, as of what was at that moment going on at the Antipodes. Her reserve towards him sensibly lessened; why, indeed, should she feel it, towards one of whom Dr. Tatham spoke so highly, and who appeared to warrant it? Moreover, Mr. Gammon took special care to speak in the most unreserved and unqualified manner of the mean and mercenary character of Mr. Quirk—of the miserable style of business in which he, Mr. Gammon, was compelled, for only a short time longer, he trusted, to participate, and which was really revolting to his own feelings; in short, he did his best to cause himself to appear a sensitive and high-minded man, whose unhappy fate it had been to be yoked with those who were the reverse. Mr. Aubrey regarded him from time to time with silent anxiety and interest, as one who had it in his power, at any instant he might choose, to cause the suspended sword to fall upon him; at whose will and pleasure he continued in the enjoyment of his present domestic happiness, instead of being incarcerated in prison; but who had hitherto evinced a disposition of signal forbearance, good-nature, and disinterestedness. They often used to speak of him, and compare the impression which his person and conduct had produced in their minds; and in two points they agreed—that he exhibited anxiety to render himself agreeable; and that there was a certain *something* about his eye which none of them liked. It seemed as though he had in a manner two natures; and that one of them was watching the effect of the efforts made by the other to beguile!

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHILE, however, the Fates thus seemed to frown upon the aspiring attempts of Gammon towards Miss Aubrey, they smiled benignantly enough upon Titmouse, and his suit with the Lady Cecilia. The first shock over—which no lively sensibilities or strong feelings of her ladyship tended to protract, she began insensibly to get familiar with the person, manners, and character

of her future lord, and reconciled to her fate. The serene intelligence of Lady Cecilia having satisfied her that "*it was her fate*" to be married to Titmouse, she resigned herself to it tranquilly, calling into her assistance divers co-operative reasons for the step she had agreed to take. She could thereby accomplish at all events one darling object of her papa's—the reunion of the long and unhappily-severed family interests. Then Yatton was certainly a delightful estate to be mistress of—a charming residence, and one which she might in all probability calculate on having pretty nearly to herself. His rent-roll was large and unencumbered, and would admit of a handsome jointure. On her accession to her own independent rank, the odious name of Titmouse would disappear in the noble one of Lady Drelincourt, peeress in her own right, and representative of the oldest barony in the kingdom. Her husband would then become a mere cipher—no one would ever hear of him, or inquire after him, or think or care about him—a mere mote in the sunbeam of her own splendour. But, above all, thank Heaven! there were many ways in which a *separation* might be brought about—never mind how soon after marriage—a step which was becoming one quite of course, and implied nothing derogatory to the character, or lessening to the personal consequence of the lady—who indeed was almost, as of course, recognized as an object of sympathy, rather than of suspicion or scorn. These were powerful forces, all impelling her in one direction—and irresistibly. How could it be otherwise with a mere creature of circumstance like her? Notwithstanding all this, however, there were occasions when Titmouse was presented to her in a somewhat startling and sickening aspect. It sometimes almost choked her to see him—ridiculous object!—in the company of gentlemen—to witness their treatment of him, and then reflect that he was about to become her—lord and master. One day, for instance, she accompanied the Earl in the carriage to witness the hounds throw off, not far from Yatton, and where a very brilliant field was expected. There were, in fact, about two hundred of the leading gentlemen of the county assembled—and, dear reader, fancy the figure Titmouse must have presented among them—his quizzing-glass screwed into his eye, and clad in his little pink and leathers!—What a seat was his! How many significant and scornful smiles, and winks, and shrugs of the shoulders did his appearance occasion among his bold and high-bred companions! And only about four or five minutes after they had "gone away"—this unhappy little devil was thoroughly found out by the noble animal he rode; and who equally well knew *his own business*, and what he had *on*. In trying to take a dwarf wall, on the opposite side of an old green horsepond by the road-side, he urged his horse with that weak and indecisive impulse which only disgusted him; so he suddenly drew back at the margin of the pond—over head and heels flew Titmouse, and descended plump on his head into the deep mud, where he remained for a moment or two, up to his shoulders, his little legs kicking about in the air—

"Who's that?" cried one—and another—and another—without stopping, any more than the Life Guards would have stopped for a sudden individual casualty in the midst of their tremendous charge at Waterloo—till the very last of them, who happened to be no less a person than Lord De la Zouch, seeing as he came up, the desperate position of the fallen rider, reined up, dismounted, and with much effort and inconvenience aided in extricating Titmouse from his fearful yet ludicrous position—and thus fortunately preserved to society one of its brightest ornaments. As soon as he was safe—a dismal spectacle to gods and men—his preserver, not disposed, by discovering who Titmouse was, to supererogatory courtesy, mounted his horse, leaving Titmouse in the care of an old woman whose cottage was not far off, and where Titmouse, having had a good deal of the filth detached from him, remounted

his horse and turned its head homewards—heartily disposed, had he but *dared*, cruelly to spur, and kick, and flog it; and in this pickle—stupid, and sullen, and crestfallen—he was overtaken and recognized by Lord Dreddlington and Lady Cecilia, returning from the field!

This was her future husband—

Then again—poor Lady Cecilia!—what thought you of the following, which was one of the letters he addressed to you? Well might Miss Aubrey exclaim, “How I should like to see their correspondence!”

“The Albany, Picadilly, London,
“12th Oct. 18.—”

“MY DEAR CECILIA,

“I take Up My pen To Inform you of Arriving safe Here, where Am sorry how^r. To say There Is No One knows except Tradespeople Going About and so Dull on Acc^t. of Customers Out of Town, Dearest love You Are the Girl of my Heart As I am of Your’s and am particular Lonely Alone Here and wish to be There *where she Is* how I long to fold My dearest girl in My Arms hope You Don’t Forget Me As soon As I am Absent do you often Think of *me* wh^b. I do indeed of *you*, and looking Forward to The Happy Days When We are United in the Happy bonds of Hymmen, never To part Again dearest I Was Driving yesterday In my New Cabb In the park, where whom Sh^d. I Meet but That Miss Aubrey Wh^b. they say (Between you and I and The post) is Truly in a Galloping Consumption on Acc^t. Of my Not Having Her A likely thing indeed that I ever car’d for Such an individule wh^b. Never Did Only of you, Dearest What shall I Send you As A Gift Shall it Be In The cloathing Line, For there Is a Wonderful Fine and Choice Assortm^t. of Cashmere Shawls and Most Remarkable Handsome Cloaks, All Newly arriv’d fr. Paris, Never Think Of The price wh^b. Betwixt Lovers Goes For Nothing. However *Large the Figure* Only Say what You Shall have and Down It shall Come And Now dearest Girl Adieu,

‘Those Can’t meet Again, who Never Part.’

dearest Your’s to command till death.

“T. TITMOUSE.

“P. T. O.—Love and Duty to My Lord (of Course) who shall Feel only Too happy to Call My Father-in-Law, the Sooner the better.”

When poor Lady Cecilia received this letter, and had read over only half-a-dozen lines of it, she flung it on the floor, and threw herself down on the sofa in her dressing-room, and remained silent and motionless for more than an hour; and when she heard Miss Macspleuchan knock at her door for admittance, Lady Cecilia started up, snatched the letter from the floor, and thrust it into her dressing-case before admitting her “humble companion.”

A succession of such letters as the above might have had the effect upon Lady Cecilia’s “*attachment*” to Titmouse, which the repeated affusion of cold water would have upon the thermometer; but the crackbrained Fates still favoured Mr. Titmouse, by presently investing him with a character, and placing him in a position, calculated to give him personal dignity and thereby redeem and elevate him in the estimation of his fastidious and lofty mistress—I mean that of candidate for a seat in Parliament—for the representation of a borough in which he had a commanding influence.

After a national commotion commensurate with the magnitude of the boon that had been sought for, the great bill for giving everybody everything had.

passed into a law, and the people were frantic with joy, its blooming first fruits were of a sort that satisfied the public expectation, viz.—two or three Earls were turned into Marquises, and one or two Marquises into Dukes, and deservedly; for these great men had far higher titles to the gratitude and admiration of the country, in exacting this second Magna Charta from King—, than the stern old barons in extorting the first from King John—namely, they parted with vast substantial political power, for only a nominal *quid pro quo*, in the shape of a bit of riband or a strawberry leaf. Its next immediate effect, was to cleanse the Augean stable of the House of Commons, by opening upon it the floodgates of popular will and popular opinion; and having utterly expelled the herd of ignorant and mercenary wretches that had so long occupied and defiled it, their places were to be supplied by a band of patriots and statesmen, as gifted as disinterested—the people's own enlightened, unbiassed, and deliberate choice. Once put the government of the country—the administration of affairs—into hands such as these, and the inevitable result would be, the immediate regeneration of society, and the securing the greatest happiness to the greatest number. It was fearfully apparent that, under the old system, we had sunk into irredeemable contempt abroad, and were on the very verge of ruin and anarchy at home. So blessedly true is it, that when things come to the worst, they begin to mend! In short, the enlightened and enlarged constituencies began forthwith to look out for fit objects of their choice—for the best men; men of independent fortune; of deep stake in the welfare of the country; of spotless private and consistent public character; who, having had adequate leisure, opportunity, inclination, and capacity, had fitted themselves to undertake, with advantage to the country, the grave responsibilities of statesmen and legislators. Such candidates, therefore, as Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse became naturally in universal request; and the consequence was, such a prodigious flight of Titmice into the House of Commons—but whither am I wandering? I have to do with only one little borough—that of Yatton, in Yorkshire. The Great Charter operated upon it, by *first*, in a manner, *amputating* it of one of its members; *secondly*, extending its boundary—Grilston, and one or two of the adjacent places, being incorporated into the new borough; *thirdly*, by the introduction of the new qualification of voters. I have ascertained from a very high quarter—in fact, from a Cabinet Minister, *since deceased*—a curious and important fact; viz., that had Mr. Titmouse failed in recovering the Yatton property, or been of different political opinions, in either of these cases, the little borough of Yatton was doomed to utter extinction: a circumstance which shows the signal vigilance, the accurate and comprehensive knowledge of local interests and capabilities evinced by those great and good men who were remodelling the representation of the country. How little did my hero suspect that his political opinions, as newly-installed owner of Yatton, formed a topic of anxious discussion at more than one Cabinet meeting, previous to the passing of the Great Bill! Upon such considerations did it depend whether Yatton should be at once deposited in the sepulchre of "*Schedule A*;" or added to the dismal rank of surviving, but *maimed* ones in "*Schedule B*." As its boundary was extended, so the constituency of Yatton was, as I have said, enlarged, the valuable elective franchise being given to those most in need of the advantages it could *immediately* procure; and the fleeting nature of whose interest, naturally enhanced their desire to consult the interests of those who had a permanent and deep stake in its welfare. Though, however, the change effected by the new act had so considerably added to the roll of electors, it had not given ground for serious apprehension as to the security of the seat of the owner of the Yatton property. After a very long and private interview between Gammon and Titmouse, in which something transpired which may be referred to hereafter, it was agreed

that—(the New Writs having issued within one week after the calmed and sobered new constituencies had been organized—which organization, again, had been wisely effected within a week or two after the passing of the act which created them)—Mr. Titmouse should instantly scare away all competition, by announcing his determination to start for the borough. As soon as this was known, a deputation from a club of the new electors in Grilston waited upon Mr. Titmouse—to propose the pecuniary terms on which their support was to be obtained. He hereat was somewhat startled—but Gammon saw in it the legitimate working of the new system; and—nothing was ever better managed!—nobody was in any mischievous secret—neither party compromised; and yet the happy result was—that *one hundred and nine* votes were secured in Grilston alone for Mr. Titmouse. Then Gammon appointed Messrs. Bloodsuck and Son the local agents of Titmouse; for whom he wrote an address to the electors—and, Titmouse promising to have it printed forthwith, Mr. Gammon returned to town for a day or two. Nothing could have been more skilful than the address which he had prepared—terse, and comprehensive, and showy, meaning everything or nothing. Yet it came to pass, that on the evening of the day of Gammon's departure, a Mr. Phelim O'Doodle, a splendid billiard player (in fact he had commenced life in the capacity of *marker* to a billiard-table near Leicester Square), and also one of the first members returned—only a few days before—for an Irish borough in the Liberal interest, chanced to take Yatton in his way to Scotland (where he was going to officiate professionally at a grand match at billiards, at the house of an early patron, Sir Archibald M'Cannon), from London; and being intimate with Mr. Titmouse, from whom (to conceal nothing from the reader) he had borrowed a little money a few months before, to enable him to present himself to his intelligent and enthusiastic constituency—they sat down to canvass the merits of the Address which the astute but *absent* Gammon had prepared for Titmouse. Mr. O'Doodle pronounced it “devilish tame and *maiger*,” comparing it to toddy, with the *whisky omitted*: and availing himself of Gammon's draft as far as he approved of it, he drew up the following Address, which put Titmouse into an ecstasy; and he sent it off the very next morning for insertion in the *Yorkshire Stingo*. Here is an exact copy of that judicious and able performance—which I must own I consider quite a model in its way.

“To the worthy and independent Electors of Yatton.”

“GENTLEMEN,—His Majesty having been pleased to dissolve the late Parliament, under very remarkable and exciting circumstances, and, in the midst of the transports of enthusiasm arising out of the passing of that second Great Charter of our Liberties, the *Act for Giving Everybody Everything*, with kindly wisdom, to call upon you to exercise immediately the high and glorious privilege of choosing your representative in the New Parliament, I beg leave to announce myself as a candidate for that distinguished honour. Gentlemen, long before I succeeded in establishing my right to reside among you in my present capacity, I felt a deep interest in the welfare of the tenants of the property, and especially of those residing in the parts adjacent, and who are now so happily introduced into the constituency of this ancient and loyal borough. I trust that the circumstance of my ancestors having resided for ages within it, will not indispose you to a favourable reception of their descendant and representative. Gentlemen, my political opinions are those which led to the passing of the Great Measure I have alluded to, and which are bound up in it. Without going into details which are too multifarious for the limits of such an Address as the present, let me assure you, that though firmly resolved to uphold the agricultural interests of this great country, I am equally

anxious to sustain the commercial and manufacturing interests; and whenever they are unhappily in fatal conflict with each other, I shall be found at my post, zealously supporting *both*, to the utmost of my ability. Though a sincere and firm member and friend of the Established Church, I am not insensible to the fearful abuses which at present prevail in it; particularly in its revenues, which I am disposed to lessen and equalize—devoting the surplus capital to useful purposes connected with the State, from which she derived them; as history testifies. I am bent upon securing the utmost possible latitude to every species of Dissent. In fact, I greatly doubt whether any form of religion ought to be *established* in a free country. While I am resolved to uphold the interests of Protestantism, I think I best do so, by seeking to remove all restrictions from the Catholics, who, I am persuaded, will sacredly abstain from endeavouring to promote their own interests at the expense of ours. The infallible page of history establishes their humility, meekness, and moderation. Gentlemen, depend upon it, the established religion is most likely to flourish when surrounded by danger, and threatened by persecution; it has an inherent vitality which will defy, in the long run, all competition. Gentleman, I am for Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform, which are in fact the Three Polar Stars of my political conduct. I am an advocate for quarterly Parliaments, convinced that we cannot too often be summoned to give an account of our stewardship—and that the frequency of elections will occasion a wholesale agitation, and stimulus to trade. I am for extending the elective franchise to all, except those who are actually the inmates of a prison or a poor-house on the day of election; and for affording to electors the inviolable secrecy and protection of the Ballot. I am an uncompromising advocate of civil and religious liberty all over the globe; and, in short, of giving the greatest happiness to the greatest number. Gentlemen, before concluding, I wish to state explicitly as the result of long and deep inquiry and reflection, that I am of opinion that every constituency is entitled, nay bound, to exact from a candidate for its suffrages the most strict and minute pledges as to his future conduct in Parliament, in every matter, great or small, that can come before it; in order to prevent his judgment being influenced and warped by the dangerous sophistries and fallacies which are broached in Parliament, and protect his integrity from the base, sinister, and corrupt influences which are invariably brought to bear on public men. I am ready, therefore, to pledge myself to anything that may be required of me by any elector who may honour me with his support. Gentlemen, such are my political principles, and I humbly hope that they will prove to be those of the electors of this ancient and loyal borough, so as to warrant the legislature in having preserved it in existence, amidst the wholesale havoc which it has just made in property of this description. Though it is not probable that we shall be harassed by a contest, I shall make a point of waiting upon you all personally, and humbly answering all questions that may be put to me; and should I be returned, rely upon it, that I will never give you occasion to regret your display of so signal an evidence of your confidence in me.—I have the honour to be, Gentlemen, your most obedient and humble servant,

“T. TITMOUSE.

“Yatton, 3rd December, 18—.”

“Upon my soul, if that don't carry the election hollow,” said Mr. O'Doodle, laying down his pen, and mixing himself a fresh tumbler of half-and-half brandy and water, “you may call me bog-trotter to the end of my days, and be — to me!” !!!

“Why—a—ya—as! 'pon my life it's quite a superior article, and no mistake,” quoth Titmouse; “but—eh? d'ye think they'll ever believe I writ it all? Egad, my fine fellow, to compose a piece of composition like that, by Jove!—requires

—and besides, suppose those dem fellows begin asking me all sorts of questions and thingumbobs, eh? You *couldn't* stay and go about with one a bit? Eh, Phelim?"

"Fait, Titty, an' it's mighty little awake to the way of *doing business*, that ye are! ah, ha! Murder and thieves! what does it signify what you choose to say or write to them? they're only *pisintry*: and—the real point to be looked at is this—all those that you can command, of course you will, or send 'em to the right about; and those that you can't—that's the *new* blackguards round about—*buy*, if it's necessary, fait." "It's done!—It *is*, 'pon my soul!" whispered Titmouse. "Oh? Is it in earnest you are? Then you're M.P. for the borough; and on the strength of it I'll replenish!" and so he did, followed by Titmouse; and in a pretty state they, some hour or two afterwards, were conducted to their apartments.

It is difficult to describe the rage of Gammon on seeing the Address which had been substituted for that which he had prepared, with so much caution and tact: but the thing was done, and he was obliged to submit. The Address duly appeared in the *Yorkshire Stingo*, and was also placarded liberally all over the borough, and distributed about, and excited a good deal of interest, and also much approbation among the new electors. It was thought, however, that it was a piece of supererogation, inasmuch as there could be no possible doubt that Mr. Titmouse would *walk over the course*.

In this, however, it presently proved that the *quidnuncs* of Yatton were very greatly mistaken. A copy of the *Yorkshire Stingo*, containing the foregoing "Address," was sent, on the day of its publication, by Dr. Tatham to Mr. Aubrey, who had read it aloud, with feelings of mingled sorrow and contempt, on the evening of its arrival, in the presence of Mrs. Aubrey, Miss Aubrey and, by no means an unfrequent visitor, Mr. Delamere. The Aubreys were sad enough; and he endeavoured to dissipate the gloom that hung over them, by ridiculing, very bitterly and humorously, the pretensions of the would-be member for Yatton—the presumed writer (who, however, Kate protested, without giving her reasons, could never have been Mr. Titmouse) of the precious "Address." He partially succeeded. Both Aubrey and he laughed heartily as they went more deliberately over it; but Kate and Mrs. Aubrey spoke very gravely and indignantly about that part of it which related to the Established Church and the Protestant religion.

"Oh dear, dear!" quoth Kate, at length, with a sudden burst of impetuosity, after a considerable and rather melancholy pause in the conversation; "only to think that such an odious little wretch is to represent the dear old—What would I not give to see him defeated?"

"Pho, Kate," replied her brother, rather sadly, "who is there to oppose him? Pickering told me, you know, that he should not go into the House again; and even if he felt disposed to contest Yatton, what chance could he have against Mr. Titmouse's influence?" "Oh, I'm sure all the old tenants hate the little monkey, to a man." "That may be, Kate, but they must vote for him, or be turned out of—"

"Oh, I've no *patience*, Charles, to hear of such things!" interrupted his sister, with not a little petulance in her manner.

"Do you mean to say, that you should like to see a rival start to contest your dear old borough with Mr. Titmouse?" inquired Mr. Delamere, who had been listening to the foregoing brief colloquy in silence, his eyes fixed with eager delight on the animated and beautiful countenance of Miss Aubrey.

"*Indeed* I should, Mr. Delamere," cried Kate eagerly; adding, however, with a sudden sigh, looking at her brother; "but—heigh-ho!—as Charles says, how absurd it is to fret one's-self about it—about a thing we can't help—and—a place one's no more any concern with?" As she said this, her voice fell a

little, and her eyes filled with tears. But her little sally had been attended with consequences she had little dreamed of. Mr. Delamere took leave of them shortly afterwards, without communicating a word of any intentions he might have conceived upon the subject to any of them. But the first place he went to, in the morning, was a great banker's, who had been appointed the principal acting executor of the Marquis of Fallowfield, a very recently deceased uncle of Delamere's, whom his lordship had left a legacy of £3,000; and 'twas to get at this same legacy that was the object of Delamere's visit to Sir Omnium Bullion's. For some time the worthy baronet—who had not then even proved the will—would not listen to the entreaties of the eager young legatee: but the moment that he heard of the purpose for which it was wanted, Sir Omnium being a very fierce Tory, and who had *lost* his own snug borough by the Bill for *Giving Everybody Everything*, instantly relented. "There, my fine fellow, that's a piece of pluck I vastly admire! Sign *that*," said Sir Omnium, tossing to him an "I.O.U. £3,000," and drawing him a cheque for the amount: wishing him, with all imaginable zeal and energy, good speed. His eager excitement would not allow him to wait till the evening, for the mail; so, within a couple of hours' time of effecting this delightful arrangement with Sir Omnium, he was seated in a post-chaise and four, rattling at top speed on his way to Yorkshire.

Sufficiently astonished were Lord and Lady De la Zouch, when he presented himself to them at Fotheringham; but infinitely more so, when he named the object of his coming down, and with irresistible entreaties besought his father's sanction for the enterprise. 'Twas very hard for Lord De la Zouch to deny anything to one on whom he doated as he did upon his son. Moreover, his lordship was one of the keenest politicians living; and as for elections, he was an old campaigner, and had stood several desperate contests, and spent immense sums upon them. And here was his son, to use a well known phrase, indeed *a chip of the old block*. Lord De la Zouch, in short, really felt a secret pleasure in contemplating the resemblance to his early self—and after a little demur he began to give way. He shook his head, however discouragingly, spoke of Delamere's youth—barely two-and-twenty; the certainty of defeat, and the annoyance of being beaten by such a creature as Titmouse; the suddenness and lateness of the move, and so forth.

More and more impetuous, however, became his son.

"I'll tell you what, sir," said Lord De la Zouch, scarce able to speak with the gravity he wished, "it strikes me that this extraordinary, and expensive, and hopeless scheme of yours is all the result of—eh? I see, I understand! It's done to please—Come now, be frank, sir! How long before you left town had you seen Miss——"

"I pledge my word, sir," replied Delamere, emphatically, "that neither Miss Aubrey nor Mr. nor Mrs. Aubrey—whom, however, I certainly saw the very night before I started, and conversed with on the subject of Mr. Titmouse's address—has interchanged one syllable with me on the subject of my starting for the borough; and I believe them to be at this moment as ignorant of what I am about as you were the moment before you saw me here."

"It is enough," said his father seriously, who knew that his son, equally with himself, had a rigorous regard for truth on all occasions, great and small, "and had it even been otherwise, I—I—eh? I don't think there's anything *very* monstrous in it!" He paused, and smiled kindly at his son, and added, "Well—I—I—we certainly shall be laughed at for our pains; it's really a madcap sort of business, Geoffrey; but"—Lord De la Zouch had given way—"I own that I should not like to have been thwarted by *my* father on an occasion like the present; so, let it be done, as you've set your heart upon it. And," he added, with a smile, "pray, Mr. Delamere, have you considered what

"I shall have to pay for your sport?" "Not one penny, sir!" replied his son, with a certain swell of manner. "Ay!" exclaimed his lordship, briskly—"How's that, sir?"

Then Delamere told him of what he had done, at which Lord de la Zouch first looked serious, and then burst into laughter at the eagerness of old Sir Omnium to aid the affair. Lord De la Zouch well knew that the old baronet was infinitely exasperated against those who had robbed him of his borough! Never was "*Schedule A*" mentioned in his presence without a kind of spasm passing over his features! As though it were the burial-ground where lay one long and fondly loved! "No, no," said his lordship, "that must not stand; I won't have *any* risk of Sir Omnium's getting into a scrape, and shall write off to request him to annul the transaction, with many thanks for what he has done; and I'll try whether I have credit enough with my bankers—eh, Geoffrey?" "You are very kind to me, sir, but really I would rather—" "Pho, pho—let it be as I say; and now, go and dress for dinner, and after that, the sooner you get about *your* 'Address' the better. Let me see a draft of it as soon as it is finished. Let Mr. Parkinson be sent for immediately from Grilston, to see how the land lies; and, in short, if we *do* go into the thing, let us dash into it with spirit. I'll write off, and have down from town—ahem!" his lordship suddenly paused, and then added, "And hark'ee, sir, as to that Address of yours, I'll have no despicable trimming, and trying to catch votes by vague and flattering——"

"Trust me, sir!" said Delamere, with a proud smile; "Mine shall be, at all events, a contrast to that of my '*honourable opponent*.'"

"Go straight a-head, sir," continued Lord De la Zouch, with a lofty and determined air; "nail your colours to the mast. Speak out in a plain, manly way, so that no one can misunderstand you. I'd rather a thousand times over see you beaten out of the field—lose the election like a gentleman—than win it by any sort of *trickery*, especially as far as the profession of your political sentiments and opinions is concerned. Bear yourself so, Geoffrey, in this your maiden struggle, that when it is over, you may be able to lay your hand on your heart, and say, 'I have *won* honourably,' 'I have *lost* honourably'. So long as you can feel and say *this*, laugh at election bills—at the long faces of your friends—the exulting faces of your enemies. Will you bear all this in mind, Geoffrey?" added Lord De la Zouch.

"I will, I will, sir," replied his eager son; and added, with an excited air, "Won't it come on them like——"

"Do you hear that bell, sir?" said Lord De la Zouch, laughing and moving away. Delamere bowed, and with a brisk step, a flushed cheek, and an elated air, betook himself to his dressing room, to prepare for dinner.

Shortly after dinner, Mr. Parkinson made his appearance, and to his infinite amazement was invested instantly with the character of agent for Mr. Delamere, as candidate for the borough! After he and the Earl had heard the following Address read by Delamere, they very heartily approved of it. Mr. Parkinson took it home with him; it was in the printer's hands that very night, and by seven o'clock in the morning was being stuck up plentifully on all the walls in Grilston, and, in fact, all over the borough:—

"To the Independent Electors of the Borough of Yatton."

"GENTLEMEN,—I hope you will not consider me presumptuous in venturing to offer myself to your notice as a candidate for the honour of representing you in Parliament. In point of years I am, I have reason to believe, even younger than the gentleman whom I have come forward to oppose. But, indeed, for the fact of his being personally a comparative stranger to you, I

should have paused long before contesting with him the representation of a borough on which he has unquestionably certain legitimate claims. The moment, however, that I had read his Address, I resolved to come forward and oppose him. Gentlemen, the chief, if not the only ground on which I am induced to take this step, is, that I disapprove of the tone and spirit of that Address, and hold opinions entirely opposed to all those which it expresses, and which I consider to be unworthy of any one seeking so grave a trust as that of representing you in Parliament. As for my own opinions, they are in all essential respects identical with those of the gentlemen who have, during a long series of years, represented you, and especially with those of my highly honoured and gifted friend Mr. Aubrey. Gentlemen, my own family is not unknown to you, nor are the opinions and principles which for centuries they have consistently supported, and which are also mine.

"I am an affectionate and uncompromising friend of our glorious and venerable Established Church, and of its union with the State; which it is my inflexible determination to support by every means in my power, as the most effectual mode of securing civil and religious liberty. I am disposed to resist any further concessions either to Roman Catholics or Dissenters, because I think that they cannot be made safely or advantageously. Gentlemen, there is a point at which toleration becomes anarchy; and I am desirous to keep as far from that point as possible.

"I earnestly deprecate putting our Agricultural or Commercial and Manufacturing interests into *competition* with each other, as needless and mischievous. Both are essential elements in the national welfare; both should be upheld to the utmost: but if circumstances *should* unhappily bring them into inevitable conflict, I avow myself heart and soul a friend to the Agricultural interest.

"Gentlemen, I know not whether it would be more derogatory to your character, or to mine, to exact or give *pledges* as to my conduct on any particular measure, great or small, which may come before Parliament. It appears to me both absurd and ignominious, and inconsistent with every true principle of representation. One, however, I willingly give you—that I will endeavour to do my duty, by consulting your interests as a part of the general interests of the nation. I trust that I shall never be found uncourteous or inaccessible; and I am confident that none of you will entertain unreasonable expectations concerning my power to serve you individually or collectively.

"Gentlemen, having entered into this contest, I pledge myself to fight it out to the last; and, if I fail, to retire with good humour. My friends and I will keep a vigilant eye on any attempts which may be made to resort to undue influence or coercion; which, however, I cannot suppose will be the case.

"Gentlemen, this is the best account I can give you, within the limits of such an Address as the present, of my political opinions, and of the motives which have induced me to come forward; and I shall, within a day or two, proceed to call upon you personally: and in the meanwhile I remain, Gentlemen, your faithful servant,

"GEOFFRY LOVEL DELAMERE.

"Fotheringham Castle,
"7th Dec. 18—."

Two or three days afterwards, there arrived at Mr. Aubrey's, in Vivian Street, two large packets, franked "De la Zouch," and addressed to Mr. Aubrey, containing four copies of the foregoing "Address," accompanied by the following hurried note:—

"MY DEAR AUBREY—What think you of this sudden and somewhat Quixotic enterprise of my son? I fear it is quite hopeless—but there was no resistin

his importunities. I must say he is going into the affair (which has already made a prodigious stir down here) in a very fine spirit. His *Address* is good, is it not? The only thing I regret is, his entering the lists with such a little creature as that fellow Titmouse—and, moreover, being *beaten* by him.—Yours ever faithfully and affectionately,

“DE LA ZOUCHE.

“P.S.—You should only see little Dr. Tatham since he has heard of it. He spins about the village like a humming-top. I hope that, as far as his worldly interests are concerned, he is not acting imprudently. Our dear love to the ladies. (In great haste.)

“Fotheringham, 8th Dec. 18—.”

This letter was read with almost suspended breath by Mr. Aubrey, and then by Mrs. and Miss Aubrey. With still greater emotion were the printed enclosures opened and read. Each was held in a trembling hand, and with colour going and coming. Miss Aubrey's heart beat faster and faster; she turned very pale—but with a strong effort recovered herself. Then taking the candle, she withdrew with a hasty and excited air, taking her copy of the *Address* with her to her own room; and there burst into tears, and wept for some time. She felt her heart dissolving in tenderness towards Delamere: it was some time before she could summon resolution enough to return. When she did, Mrs. Aubrey made a faint effort to rally her; but each, on observing the traces of the other's recent and strong emotion, was silent, and with difficulty refrained from bursting again into tears.

Equally strong emotions, but of a very different description, were excited in the bosoms of certain persons at Yatton Hall, by the appearance of Mr. Delamere's address. 'Twas Mr. Barnabas Bloodsuck (junior)—a middle-sized, square-set young man, of about thirty, with a broad face, a very flat nose, light frizzly hair, and deep-set grey eyes—a bustling, confident, hard-mouthed fellow—who, happening to be stirring in the main street of Grilston early in the morning of the 8th December, 18—, beheld a man in the act of sticking up Mr. Delamere's *Address* against a wall. Having prevailed on the man to part with one, Mr. Bloodsuck was within a quarter of an hour on horseback, galloping down to Yatton—almost imagining himself to be carrying with him a sort of hand-grenade, which might explode in his pocket as he went on. He was ushered into the breakfast-room, where sat Mr. Gammon and Mr. Titmouse, just finishing breakfast.

“My stars—good morning! gents,—but here's a kettle of fish!” quoth Mr. Bloodsuck with an excited air, wiping the perspiration from his forehead; and then plucking out of his pocket the damp and crumpled *Address* of Mr. Delamere, he handed it to Mr. Gammon, who changed colour on seeing it, and read it over in silence. Mr. Titmouse looked at him with a disturbed air; and, having finished his mixture of tea and brandy, “Eh—e—eh, Gammon!—I say”—he stammered—“what's in the wind? 'Pon my soul, you look—eh?”

“Nothing but a piece of good fortune, for which you are indebted to your distinguished friend, Mr. Phelim O'Something,” replied Gammon bitterly, “whose precious *Address* has called forth for you an opponent whom you would not otherwise have had.”

“Hang Mr. O'Doodle! exclaimed Titmouse; “I—'pon my precious soul—I always thought him a-a fool and a knave. I'll make him pay me the money he owes me!” and he strode up and down the room, with his hands thrust furiously into his pockets.

“You had perhaps better direct your powerful mind to this *Address*,” quoth Mr. Gammon, with a blighting smile, “as it slightly concerns you;” and handing it to Titmouse, the latter sat down to try and obey him.

"That cock won't fight, though, eh?" inquired Mr. Bloodsuck, as he resumed his seat after helping himself to an enormous slice of cold beef at the side table.

"I think it *will*," replied Mr. Gammon thoughtfully; and presently continued, after a pause, with a visible effort to speak calmly, "it is useless to say anything about the haughty intolerant Toryism it displays; that is all fair; but *is* it not hard, Mr. Bloodsuck, that when I had written an Address which would have effectually——"

"Mr. Phelim O'Doodle owes me three hundred pounds, Gammon, and I hope you'll get it for me at once; 'pon my soul, he's a most cursed scamp," quoth Titmouse furiously, looking up with an air of desperate chagrin, on hearing Gammon's last words. That gentleman, however, took no notice of him, and proceeded, addressing Mr. Bloodsuck, "I have weighed every word in that address; it means mischief. It has evidently been well considered; it is calm and determined—and we shall have a desperate contest, or I am grievously mistaken."

"E—e—eh? E—h? What, Gammon?" inquired Titmouse, who, though his eye appeared, in obedience to Gammon, to have been travelling over the all-important document which he held in his hand, had been listening with trembling anxiety to what was said by his companions.

"I say that we are to have a contested election for the borough; you won't walk over the course, as you might have done. Here's a dangerous opponent started." "What? 'Pon my soul—for *my* borough? For Yatton?" "Yes, and one who will fight you tooth and nail." "'Pon—my—precious soul! What a cursed scamp! What a most infernal black—Who is it?" "No *blackguard*, sir," interrupted Gammon, very sternly; "but—a gentleman, perhaps even every way equal to yourself," he added, with a cruel smile, "the Honourable Mr. Delamere, the son and heir of Lord De la Zouch." "By jingo! you don't say so! Why, he's a hundred thousand a-year," interrupted Titmouse, turning very pale.

"Oh, *that* he has, at least," interposed Mr. Bloodsuck, who had nearly finished a disgusting breakfast; "and two such bitter Tories you never saw or heard of before—for, like father, like son."

"Egad; is it?" inquired Titmouse, completely crestfallen. "Well! and what if—eh, Gammon? Isn't it?" "It is a very serious business, sir, indeed," quoth Gammon, gravely. "By Jove—isn't it a cursed piece of—impudence! What? Come into *my* borough? He might as well come into my house! Isn't one as much mine as the other? It's as bad as housebreaking—but we're beforehand with him, anyhow, with those prime chaps at Gr——" Mr. Bloodsuck's teeth chattered; he glanced towards the door; and Gammon gave Titmouse a look that almost paralysed him, and silenced him.

"They'll bleed freely?" said Bloodsuck by-and-by, with a desperate effort to look concerned—whereas he was in a secret ecstasy at the profitable work in prospect for their house. "Lord De la Zouch would not have entered into this thing if he had not some end in view which he considers attainable—and as for money——" "Oh, as for that," said Bloodsuck, with a matter-of-fact air, "ten thousand pounds to him is a mere drop in the bucket." "O Lord! O Lord! and must *I* spend money too?" inquired Titmouse, with a look of ludicrous alarm.

"We must talk this matter over alone, Mr. Bloodsuck," said Gammon, anxiously—"shall we go to Grilston, or will you fetch your father hither?"

"'Pon my soul, Gammon," quoth Titmouse desperately, and snapping his finger and thumb, "those cursed Aubreys, you may depend on't, are at the bottom of all this——"

"*That there's not the least doubt of*," quoth Bloodsuck, as he buttoned up

his coat with a matter-of-fact air; but the words of Titmouse caused Mr. Gammon suddenly to dart, first at one, and then at the other of them, a keen penetrating glance; and presently his expressive countenance showed that *surprise* had been succeeded by deep chagrin, which soon settled into gloomy thoughtfulness.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THERE had not been a contested election at Yatton, till the present one between Mr. Delamere and Mr. Titmouse, for upwards of twenty-four years; its two members having been, till then, owing to the smallness of the constituency, their comparative unanimity of political sentiment, and the dominant influence of the Yatton family, returned pretty nearly as a matter of course. When, therefore, quiet little Yatton (for such it was, albeit somewhat enlarged by the new Act) became the scene of so sudden and hot a contest as that which I am going to describe, it seemed in a manner quite beside itself. The walls were everywhere covered with staring, glaring, placards—red, blue, green, yellow, white, purple—judiciously designed to stimulate the electors into a calm and intelligent exercise of their important functions. Here are a few of them:—

“Vote for Titmouse, the Man of the People!” “Titmouse and Civil and Religious Liberty!” “Titmouse and Purity of Election!” “Titmouse and Negro Emancipation!” “Titmouse and Cheap Ale!” “Vote for Titmouse and No Mistake!” “Titmouse and Quarterly Parliaments, Vote by Ballot, and Universal Suffrage!”

[’Twas thus that the name of my little friend, like that of many others of his species, was attached to great public questions, after the manner of a kettle tied to a dog’s tail; and a pretty clatter it made!]

But there were others of a more elaborate and impressive character.

“Electors of Yatton!! Be not deceived!!! The enemy is among you! Do you wish to reap the full fruits of the glorious boon lately conferred on you? Rush to the poll, and Vote for Titmouse. Do you wish to see them torn from your grasp by a selfish and beastly aristocracy? *Get a pair of handcuffs*, and go and vote for—Mr. Delamere!!!!” “Quære. If a *certain Borough-mongering Peer* should command his son to vote for the Repeal of the Great Bill which enfranchised the inhabitants of Grilston, Succombe, and Warkleigh—would not that son obey him? *How is this*, Mr. Delamere?”

’Twas not, to give the devil his due, Mr. Titmouse’s fault that his placards did not contain many vulgar and presumptuous personalities against his opponent; but it was entirely owing to Mr. Gammon’s want of the requisite wit and spirit. He felt, in fact, that such a candidate as Mr. Delamere afforded but few salient points of attack, in respect either of his person, his position in society, or his conduct. He also, by the way, had his placards:—

“Vote for Delamere!” “Delamere and Independence!” “Vote for Delamere, the Farmer’s Friend!” “Delamere, and the Constitution in Church and State!”

Both the candidates established their head-quarters at Grilston; Mr. Delamere at the “*Hare and Hounds*” Inn, Mr. Titmouse at the “*Woodlouse*.” Over the bow-window of the former streamed a noble blue banner, with an emblazonment of the Bible and Crown, and the words, Church, King, and

Constitution—Old England for ever!” Over the latter hung an immense yellow banner, with three stars, so—

PEACE !

*

RETRENCHMENT !!

*

*
REFORM !!!

(being the “Three Polar Stars” spoken of in Mr. Titmouse’s Address), and the words—“Peace! Retrenchment!! Reform!!!” in immense gilt letters. The walls and windows of each were, moreover, covered with vari-coloured placards—but I shall not weary the reader by attempting to describe in detail the humours of a country election, which have employed already thousands of able and graphic pens and pencils. Surely, what else are *they* than the sticks and straws which float along the eddying and roughened surface? The whole mass of water is moving along; and our object should be rather to discover its depth, its force, and direction. Principles are in conflict; the fate of the nation is, in a measure, involved in a popular election. Such matters as I have alluded to are but the laughable devices resorted to in order to delude the grinning vulgar, and disguise the movements of those calm and calculating persons who are playing the deep game of politics. Under cover of a ludicrous hubbub might be observed, for instance, in this little borough—subject to certain petty local disturbing forces—a deadly struggle for ascendancy between the monarchical and the democratical principle; between rampant innovation and obstinate immobility! between the wealthy few and the many poor; between property and ability. If anything like this *were* the case, how many of the electors—new or old of Yatton—(who may perhaps be compared to chessmen in the hands of long-headed players)—knew any more about the matter than a private soldier at Waterloo thought of, comprehended, or appreciated, the complicated and mighty schemes of a Wellington or Napoleon, whose bidding he was doing, or of the prodigious consequences attached to the success or failure of either? Some people talk vehemently about the “paramount necessity for educating the lower classes.” It is, indeed, of incalculable importance that they should be instructed; but is it not of still greater importance that the upper classes should be instructed, if only on account of their being the holders of that property, in greater or less proportions, with its inseparable power and influence, which, directly or indirectly, determines all the movements of the state? Could such a state of things as universal suffrage be supposed to exist consistently with the preservation of social order—of society—it would still be impossible to extirpate or effectually to counteract the influence of property, in whose hands soever it may be placed. Pluck out of the vilest of the bellowing bullies surrounding the hustings, him (of course a non-elect) most conspicuous for his insolence and brutality; suppose him suddenly or gradually become the owner of a great or a small property, with the influence it gives him over customers, tenants, dependents: do you suppose that he will not at once, either gently or roughly, according to his temper, begin to exercise his power (that which is so dear to the heart of man), by dictating the exercise of the elective franchise in favour of those political opinions which he may happen to favour? Is not *this* the man to instruct, and the better, in proportion to the extent of his real influence? The influence of property is inevitable as that of gravitation: and losing sight of

this, people may split their heads in vain, and chatter till the arrival of the Greek kalends, about extending further and further the elective franchise, shortening parliaments, and voting by ballot. Whether it *ought* to be so signifies but little, when we know that it is, and *will* be so.

Lord De la Zouch, who resided some eight or ten miles from Yatton, soon discovered, as also did sundry other very able and experienced electioneering friends, taking an interest in his son's success, that the movements of the enemy were directed by a strong and skilful hand; and which never could be that of *Mr. Titmouse*. However slight and faint may be the hopes of success with which a man enters into an interesting and important undertaking, they very soon begin to increase and brighten with eager action; and it was so with Lord De la Zouch. He was not long in tracing the powerful, but cautiously-concealed, agency of our friend Mr. Gammon. One or two such dangerous and artful snares were detected by the watchful and practised eyes of his lordship and his friends, just in time to prevent Delamere from being seriously compromised, as satisfied them that good Mr. Parkinson, with all his bustle, energy, and heartiness, was dreadfully overmatched by his astute opponent, Mr. Gammon; and that in the hands of Mr. Parkinson, the contest would become, as far as Delamere was concerned, a painful and ridiculous farce. A council of war, therefore, was called at Fotheringham Castle; the result of which was an express being sent off to London, to bring down immediately a first-rate electioneering agent—Mr. Crafty—and place in his hands the entire management of Mr. Delamere's cause. Mr. Crafty was between forty and forty-five years old. His figure, of middle height, was very spare. He was always dressed in a plain suit of black, with white neckerchief, and no collars; yet no one that knew the world could mistake him for a dissenting minister!—He was very calm and phlegmatic in his manner and movements—there was not a particle of passion or feeling in his composition. He was a mere *thinking machine*, in exquisite order. He was of marvellous few words. His face was thin and angular. His chin and temples formed an isosceles triangle; his chin being very peaked, his forehead very broad. His hair was dark, and cut almost as close as that of a foot soldier—and this it was that helped to give his countenance that expression, at once quaint and unaffected which, once observed, was not likely to be soon forgotten. His eye was blue, and intensely cold and bright—his complexion fresh; he had no whiskers; there was a touch of sarcasm about the corners of his mouth. Everything about him bespoke a man cold, cautious, acute, matter-of-fact. "*Business*" was written all over his face. He had devoted himself to electioneering tactics; and he might be said to have reduced them, indeed, to a science. No one could say whether he was of Whig or Tory politics; my impression is, that he cared not a straw for either. This, then, was the man who was to be pitted against Gammon: and these two gentlemen may be, perhaps, looked upon as the real *players*, whose *backers* were—Delamere and Titmouse.

Mr. Crafty soon made his appearance at Yatton; and seemed, in a manner, to have dropped into Mr. Delamere's committee-room from the clouds. His presence did not appear *quite* unexpected; yet no one seemed to know why, whence, or at whose instance he had come. He never went near Fotheringham nor ever mentioned the name of its noble owner, who (between ourselves) contemplated the accession of Crafty with feelings of calm exultation and confidence. Mr. Delamere's "*committee*" was instantly disbanded, and no new one named. In fact, *there was to be none at all*; and Mr. Titmouse's friends were, for a while, led to believe that the enemy were already beginning to beat a retreat. A quiet banker at Grilston, and a hard-headed land-surveyor and agent of the same place were alone apparently taken into Mr. Crafty's confidence. Mr. Parkinson,

even, was sent to the right about; and his rising pique and anger were suddenly quelled by the steadfast and significant look with which Mr. Crafty observed in dismissing him—"It won't do." Adjoining, and opening into the large room in which, till Mr. Crafty's arrival, Mr. Delamere's committee had sat, was a very small one; and in it Mr. Crafty established his headquarters. He came, accompanied—though no one for a while knew it—by three of his familiars; right trusty persons, in sooth. One of them always sat on a chair, at the outside of the door leading into Mr. Crafty's room, over which he kept guard as a sentinel. The other two disposed themselves according to orders. Mr. Gammon soon *felt* the presence of his secret and formidable opponent, in the total change—the quiet system—that became all of a sudden apparent in the enemy's tactics: his watchful eye and quick perception detected, here and there, the faint vanishing traces of a sly and stealthy foot—the evidences of experienced skill; and one morning early he caught a glimpse of Mr. Crafty (with whose name and fame he was familiar), and returned home with a grave consciousness that the contest had become one exceedingly serious; that—so to speak—he must instantly spread out every stitch of canvas to overtake the enemy. In short, he made up his mind for mischief, as soon as he gave Lord De la Zouch credit for being *resolved to win*; and felt the necessity for acting with equal caution and decision. During that day he obtained an advance from a neighbouring banker of two thousand pounds, on the security of a deposit of a portion of the title-deeds of the Yatton property. He had, indeed, occasion for great resources, personal as well as pecuniary; for instance—he had reason to believe that the enemy had already penetrated to his stronghold, the Quaint Club at Grilston (for that was the name of the club into which the one hundred and nine new voters at Grilston had formed themselves). Though Gammon had agreed, after much negotiation, to buy them at the very liberal sum of ten pounds a-head, he had reason, shortly after the arrival of Mr. Crafty, to believe that they had been tampered with; for, as he was late one evening moodily walking up to the Hall, in the park he overtook a man whose person he did not at first recognise in the darkness, but whose fearfully significant motions soon ensured him recognition. It was, in fact, the man who had hitherto treated with him on behalf of the Quaint Club; one Benjamin Bran (commonly called *Ben Bran*), a squat, bow-legged baker of Grilston. He uttered not a word, nor did Mr. Gammon; but, on being recognized, simply held up to Mr. Gammon his two outstretched hands, *twice*, with a significant and inquiring look. Gammon gazed at him for a moment with fury; and muttering—"to-morrow—here—same hour!" hurried on to the Hall in a state of the utmost perplexity and alarm. The dilemma in which he felt himself, kept him awake half the night! When once you come to *this sort of work*, you are apt to give your opponent credit for deeper manoeuvring than you can at the time fully appreciate; and the fate of the battle may soon be rendered really doubtful. Then, everything—inclusive of serious consequences, extending far beyond the mere result of the election—depends upon the skill, temper, and experience of the real and responsible directors of the election. Was Ben Bran's appearance a move on the part of Crafty? Had that gentleman bought him over and converted him into a spy—was he now playing the traitor? Or was the purse of Titmouse to be *bonâ fide* measured against that of Lord De la Zouch? *That would be dreadful!* Gammon felt (to compare him for a moment to an animal with whom he had some kindred qualities) much like a cat on a very high glass wall, afraid to stir in any direction, and yet unable to continue where he was.

While the two candidates, attended by their sounding bands, and civil and smiling friends, were making their public demonstrations and canvassing the electors, as if thereby they exercised the slightest possible influence over one

single elector on either side; as I have already intimated, the battle was being fought by two calm and crafty heads, in two snug and quiet little rooms in Grilston—one at the Hare and Hounds, the other at the Woodlouse Inn; of course, I mean Mr. Crafty and Mr. Gammon. The former within a very few hours saw that the issue of the struggle lay with the Quaint Club; and from one of his trusty emissaries—a man whom no one ever saw in communication with him, who was a mere stranger in Grilston, indifferent as to the result of the election, but delighting in its frolics, who was peculiarly apt to get sooner drunk than any one he drunk with—Mr. Crafty ascertained, that though the enlightened members of the Quaint Club had certainly formed a predilection for the principles of Mr. Titmouse, yet they possessed a candour which disposed them to hear all that might be advanced in favour of the principles of his opponent.

Mr. Crafty's first step was to ascertain what had been already done or attempted on behalf of Mr. Delamere, and also of Mr. Titmouse; then the exact number of the voters, whom he carefully classified. He found that there were exactly four hundred who might be expected to poll; the new electors amounting in number to one hundred and sixty, the old ones to two hundred and forty, and principally scot-and-lot voters. In due time he ascertained, that of the former class only *thirty-six* could be relied upon for Mr. Delamere. The tenants of the Yatton property within the borough amounted to one hundred and fifteen. They had been canvassed by Mr. Delamere and his friends with great delicacy; and twenty-three of them had voluntarily pledged themselves to vote for him, and risk all consequences; intimating that they hated and despised their new landlord as much as they loved their old one, whose principles they understood to be those of Mr. Delamere. Then there remained a class of "*accessibles*" (to adopt the significant language of Mr. Crafty), in number one hundred and twenty-five. These were persons principally resident in and near Yatton, subject undoubtedly to strong and direct influence on the part of Mr. Titmouse, but still not absolutely at his command. Of these no fewer than seventy had pledged themselves in favour of Mr. Delamere; and, in short, thus stood Mr. Crafty's calculations as to the probable force on both sides:—

DELAMERE.				TITMOUSE.			
New Voters	.	.	36	New Voters—	.	.	
Yatton Tenants	.	.	23	Quaint Club	.	.	109
Accessibles	.	.	70	Others	.	.	21
			129				130
				Tenants	.	.	92
				Accessibles	.	.	35
							257

Now, of the class of *accessibles* twenty remained yet unpledged, and open to conviction; and moreover, both parties had good ground for believing that they would *all* be convinced *one way*—*i.e.*, towards either Mr. Titmouse or Mr. Delamere. Now, if the Quaint Club could be in any way detached from Mr. Titmouse, it would leave him with a majority of *seventeen* only over Mr. Delamere; and then, if by any means the twenty accessibles could be secured for Mr. Delamere, he would be placed in a majority of three over his opponent. Whichever way *they* went, however, it was plain that the Quaint Club held the election in their own hands, and intended to keep it so. Gammon's calculations differed but slightly from those of Crafty; and thenceforth both directed their best energies towards the same point, the Quaint Club—going on all the while with undiminished vigour and assiduity with their canvass, as the best

mode of diverting attention from their important movements, and satisfying the public that the only weapons with which the fight was to be won were—bows, smiles, civil speeches, placards, squibs, banners, and bands of music. Mr. Crafty had received a splendid sum for his services from Lord De la Zouch; but on the first distinct and peremptory intimation from his lordship, being conveyed to him through Mr. Delamere, that there was to be, *bonâ fide*, no bribery—and that the only funds placed at his disposal were those sufficient for the *legitimate* expenses of the election—he smiled rather bitterly, and sent off a secret express to Fotheringham, to ascertain *for what* his services had been engaged—since what was the use of going to *Waterloo without powder*?—The answer he received was laconic enough, and verbatim as follows:—

“No intimidation; no treating; no bribery; *manceuvre* as skilfully as you can; and *watch the enemy night and day*, so that the close of the poll may not be the close of the election, nor the victor there the sitting member.”

To the novel, arduous, and cheerless duty, defined by this despatch from headquarters, Mr. Crafty immediately addressed all his energies; and, after carefully reconnoitring his position, unpromising as it was, he did not *despair* of success. All his own voters had been gained, upon the whole, fairly. The thirty-six new voters had been undoubtedly under considerable *influence*, of an almost inevitable kind indeed—inasmuch as they consisted of persons principally employed in the way of business by Lord De la Zouch, and by many of his friends and neighbours, all of whom were of his lordship's way of political thinking. Every one of the twenty-three tenants had given a spontaneous and cordial promise; and the seventy “accessibles” had been gained, after a very earnest and persevering canvass, by Mr. Delamere, in company with others who had a pretty decisive and legitimate influence over them. The remaining twenty might, possibly, though not probably, be secured by equally unobjectionable means.

That being the state of things with Delamere, how stood matters with Mr. Titmouse? First and foremost, the Quaint Club had been bought at ten pounds a-head, by Gammon—that was all certain. Crafty would also have bought them like a flock of sheep, had he been allowed, and would have managed matters most effectually and secretly; yet not more so than he found Mr. Gammon had succeeded in doing: at all events, as far as he himself personally was concerned. In fact, he had foiled Mr. Crafty, when that gentleman looked about in search of legal evidence of what had been done. Still, however, he did not despair of being able to perform a series of *manceuvres* which should secure one of the ends he most wished, in respect even of the Quaint Club. With equal good intentions, but actuated by a *zeal that was not according to knowledge*, some of Mr. Gammon's coadjutors had not imitated his circumspection. Quite unknown to him, one or two of them had most fearfully committed him, themselves, and Mr. Titmouse; giving Mr. Gammon such accounts of their doings as should serve only to secure his applause for their tact and success. Before Mr. Crafty they stood detected as blundering novices in the art of electioneering. A small tinker and brazier at Warkleigh had received, with a wink, ten pounds from a member of Mr. Titmouse's committee, in payment of an old out standing account—Heaven save the mark!—delivered in by him three years before, for mending pots, kettles, and saucepans, in the time of—the Aubreys! The wife of a tailor at Grilston received the same sum for a fine tom-cat, which was a natural curiosity, since it could wink each eye separately and successively. A third worthy and independent voter was reminded that he had lent the applicant for his vote ten pounds several years before, and which that gentleman now took shame to himself, as he paid the amount, for having so long allowed to remain unpaid. Mr. Barnabas Bloodsuck, with superior astuteness, gave three pounds a-piece to three little boys, sons of a voter, whose workshop overlooked Messrs. Bloodsuck's

back offices, on condition that they would desist from their trick of standing and putting their thumbs to their noses and extending their fingers towards him, as he sat in his office, and which had really become an insupportable nuisance. Here was, therefore, a *valuable consideration* for the payment, and bribery was out of the question. Such are samples of the ingenious devices which had been resorted to, in order to secure some thirty or forty votes! In short, Mr. Crafty caught them tripping in at least eleven clear and unquestionable cases of bribery, each supported by unimpeachable evidence, and each sufficing to avoid the election, to disqualify Mr. Titmouse from sitting in that Parliament for Yatton, and to subject both him and his agents to a ruinous amount of penalties. Then, again, there were clear indications either of a disposition to set at defiance the stringent provisions of the law against *treating*, or of an ignorance of their existence. And as for *freedom* of election, scarcely ten of his tenants gave him a willing vote, or otherwise than upon compulsion, and after threats of raised rents or expulsion from farms. Tied as were Mr. Crafty's hands, the Quaint Club became a perfect eyesore to him. He found means, however, to open a secret and confidential communication with them, and resolved to hold out to them dazzling but indistinct hopes of pecuniary advantage from the regions of Fotheringham. His emissary soon got hold of the redoubtable Ben Bran, who, truth to say, had long been on the look-out for indications of the desired sort from the other side. As Bran was late one evening walking slowly alone along the high-road leading to York, he was accosted by a genteel-looking person, who spoke in a low tone, and whom Bran now recollected to have seen, or spoken to, before. "Can you tell me where lies the gold mine?" said the stranger; "at Fotheringham or Yatton?"—and the speaker looked round, apprehensive of being overheard. Ben pricked up his ears, and soon got into conversation with the mysterious stranger; in the course of which the latter threw out, in a very significant manner, that "a certain peer could never be supposed to send a certain near relative into the field, in order that that relative might be beaten, * * * and especially for want of a few pounds; and besides, my friend, when only * * *—eh?—* * *—the other side—" "Why, who are you? Where do you come from?" inquired Ben, with a violent start. "Dropped out of the—moon," was the quiet and smiling answer. "Then I must say they know a precious deal," replied Ben, after a pause, "up there, of what's going on down here." "To be sure, everything; everything!" * * * Here the stranger told Ben the precise sum which the club had received from Mr. Gammon. "Are we both—gentlemen?" inquired the stranger earnestly. "Y—e—e—s, I hope so, sir," replied Ben hesitatingly. "And men of business—men of our word?" "Honour among thieves—ay, ay," answered Ben in a still lower tone, and very eagerly. "Then let you and me meet *alone*, this time to-morrow, at Darkling Edge; and by that time, do you see, turn this over in your mind," here the stranger twice held up both his hands, with outstretched thumbs and fingers. "Sure we understand each other?" added the stranger.

Ben nodded, and they were presently out of sight of each other. The stranger gentleman pulled off his green spectacles, and also a pair of grey whiskers, and put both of them into his pocket. If anyone attempted to *dog* him, he must have been led a pretty round! 'Twas in consequence of this interview that Ben made the application to Gammon, which had so disturbed him, and which has been already described. And to return to our friend: what was he to do? On returning to the Hall, he opened a secret drawer in his desk, and took out a thin slip of paper which he had deposited there that morning, it having been then received by him from town, marked "*Private and Confidential*," and franked "*Blossom and Box*." 'Twas but a line, and written in a bold hand, but in evident haste; for it had in fact been penned by Lord Blossom

and Box while he was sitting in the Court of Chancery. This is a copy of it:—

“The election *must be won*. You will hear from E—— by this post.—Don’t address any note to *me*.

“B. and B.”

With this great man, Lord Chancellor Blossom and Box, when plain Mr. Quicksilver, Mr. Gammon had had a pretty familiar acquaintance, as the reader may easily suppose; and had a natural desire to acquit himself creditably in the eyes of so distinguished a personage. Gammon had volunteered an assurance to his lordship, shortly before leaving town, that the election was safe, and in his (Gammon’s) hands; guess, then, his chagrin and fury at finding the systematic and determined opposition which had suddenly sprung up against him; and the intensity of his desire to defeat it. And the more anxious he was on this score, the more vividly he perceived the necessity of acting with a caution which should ensure real ultimate success, instead of a mere noisy and temporary triumph, which should be afterwards converted into most galling, disgraceful, and public defeat. The more that Gammon reflected on the sudden but determined manner in which Lord De la Zouch had entered into the contest, the more confident he became that his lordship had an important ultimate object to secure; and that he had at command immense means of every description, Gammon but too well knew, in common with all the world. Was, for instance, Mr. Crafty brought down, at an enormous expense, for nothing? What the deuce were the Quaint Club about? Was ever anything so monstrous heard of—ten pounds a man received—the bargain finally struck—and now their original demand suddenly and peremptorily doubled? Venal miscreants! Was the other side really outbidding him, or laying a deep plan for entrapping him into an act of wholesale bribery? In short, were the Quaint Club now actuated by avarice, or by treachery? Again and again did he go over his list of promises; having marked the *favourable, hostile, neutral, doubtful*, from a table as accurately compiled and classified as that of Mr. Crafty. Like his wily and practised opponent, also, Gammon entrusted his principal movements to scarce a soul of those who were engaged with him; fearing, indeed, though *then* with no definite grounds, that Messrs. Mudflint, Woodlouse, Centipede, Bloodsuck, and Going Gone, were already too deep in the secrets of the election. According to *his* calculations, supposing all his promises to stand, Titmouse was, independently of the Quaint Club, and some eighteen or twenty others whom he had set down as “*to be had*”—only *twenty-five* a-head of Delamere; thus making a difference of eight only between his calculation and that of Crafty. Of course, therefore, that cursed Quaint Club had it all their own way; and how to jockey them, was a problem that well nigh split his head. He gave Lord De la Zouch credit for doing all that he—Gammon—could do, to win the election; and believed him, therefore, capable of buying over any number of the club, to turn king’s evidence against their *original* benefactor. The Bloodsucks assured him that the club were all good men and true—staunch—game to the backbone; but Gammon had obtained information as to the political sentiments of several of the members, before they had acquired the new franchise, and became banded into so sudden and formidable a confederacy, which led him to speculate rather apprehensively on the effects which might follow any bold and skilful scheme which might be resorted to by his enemies. Now, as far as the club was concerned, its members were all quiet respectable men, who made the affair a dry matter of business. They justly looked on each of the candidates as equally worthy of the honour they coveted of representing the borough, and considered that they would always go on right at head-quarters—*i.e.*, that the country

would be properly governed—with out the least reference to the quality or complexion of the House of Commons. They saw the desperate and unceasing fight going on amongst their betters for the loaves and fishes ; and imitated their example with reference to the crumbs and fragments. First they divided themselves, as near as their number would admit of, into tens, giving one to the odd nine, equally with each body of ten, and thus produced a body of eleven representatives. These eleven, again, in the presence of the whole club, chose five of their number for the purpose of conducting the negotiations between the club and the two candidates ; and these five again selected one of themselves—Ben Bran—to be the actual medium of communication : the actual state of the market never went beyond the first body of eleven ; and in the exercise of an exquisite dexterity, Mr. Crafty had contrived to inspire these eleven, through their deputy and mouthpiece, Bran, with a determination to exact *fifteen* pounds per head more from Titmouse, before recording their votes in his favour ; and this untoward state of things was duly intimated to Gammon by Ben Bran, by silently outstretching both hands and then one hand. That would make a total of *two thousand seven hundred and twenty-five pounds* disbursed among that accursed Quaint Club alone!—thought Gammon with a shudder : and suppose they should even then turn tail upon him, seduced by the splendid temptations of Lord De la Zouch ? Just to conceive the possibility, for one moment, of Mr. Benjamin Bran having been bought over to betray all his companions, and Gammon and his party also, into the hands of Lord De la Zouch ? Saith the immortal author of *Hudibras*—

“ Ah me, the perils that environ
The man that meddles with cold iron ! ”

But I shall make an exclamation of my own—

“ What pen *his* troubles shall describe,
Who voters once begins to bribe ! ”

“ Oh ! ” thought Mr. Gammon, a thousand times, “ that cursed Quaint Club ! —That cursed Crafty ! ”

The very first person on whom Delamere waited, in order to solicit his support, was little Dr. Tatham, who, I need hardly say, gave it promptly and cordially ; but he added, shaking his head, that he knew he was giving huge offence to the people at the Hall, who had already been several times very urgent indeed with him. “ Well, rather, sir, than sow dissension between you and Mr. Titmouse, your neighbour,” said Delamere spiritedly, “ I at once release you from your promise.”

“ Ah ! indeed ? ” cried Dr. Tatham briskly—“ Do you ? *Can* you ? Ought you to do so ? I look upon the exercise of my franchise to be a sacred duty, and I shall discharge it as readily and as conscientiously as any other duty, come what may.” Delamere looked at him, and thought how often he had heard Miss Aubrey talk of him with affectionate enthusiasm, and he believed the little Doctor to be every way worthy of it. “ For myself,” continued Dr. Tatham, “ I care little ; but I have reason greatly to apprehend the effects of his displeasure upon those who are disposed—as such I know they are—to go counter to his wishes. He’ll make them rue the day——”

“ Aye ?—Let him ! ” exclaimed Mr. Delamere, with an eye of bright defiance ; but it kindled only a faint momentary spark of consolation in the breast of Dr. Tatham.

The rivals, Mr. Delamere and Mr. Titmouse, encountered one another, as it were in full state, on the second day of the former’s canvass. ’Twas in the street. Mr. Delamere was attended by Mr. Parkinson, Sir Percival Pickering,

Mr. St. Aubyn, Mr. Aylward Elvet, Mr. Gold, and one or two others. Mr. Delamere looked certainly very handsome. About his person, countenance, and carriage, there was an air of manly frankness, refinement, and simplicity; and a glance at his aristocratic cast of features, told you that a certain latent tendency to *hauteur* was kept in check by sincere good-nature. He was tall and well-proportioned, and his motions had a natural ease and grace; and as for his dress, it combined a rigid simplicity with an undoubted fashion and elegance. Though the air was very cold and frosty, he wore only a plain dark-coloured surtout buttoned.

"Delamere! Delamere!" whispered with a smile Mr. St. Aubyn (one of the former members for the borough), on first catching sight of the enemy approaching them on the same side of the street, at about twenty yards' distance—"Here comes your opponent; he's a little beauty, eh?"

Mr. Titmouse walked first, dressed in a fine drab-coloured great-coat, with velvet collar of the same hue, and sable near a foot deep at the wrists. It was buttoned tightly round a pinched-in waist, and a white cambric handkerchief peeped out of a pocket in the breast. He had a red and green plaid waistcoat, and a full satin stock, glistening with little pins and chains. His trousers were sky-blue, and very tight, and covered almost the whole of his boot; so that it was a wonder to the vulgar how he ever got into or out of them. The little that was seen of his boots shone wonderfully; and he wore spurs at his heels. His span-new glossy hat was perched aslant on his bushy hair; he wore lemon-coloured kid gloves, and a delicate little ebony cane. Following this pretty little figure were—the sallow insolent-looking "*Reverend*" Smirk Mudflint (such was the title he assumed), Mr. Centipede, Mr. Grogram, Mr. Bloodsuck, junior (who had approached as near, in point of personal appearance, to his illustrious client, as he knew how), and—Mr. Gammon. As the hostile companies neared each other, that of Delamere observed some one hastily whisper to Titmouse, who instantly stuck his chased gold eyeglass into his eye, and stared very vulgarly at Mr. Delamere—who, on passing him, with the courtesy he conceived due to an opponent, took off his hat, and bowed with politeness and grace, his example being followed by all his party. Titmouse, however, took not the least notice of the compliment; but, without removing his glass from his eye, throwing an odious sneer into his face, stared steadily at Mr. Delamere, and so passed on. Mr. Barnabas Bloodsuck ably seconded him. Mudflint, with a bitter smirk, touched his hat slightly; Centipede affected to look another way; Grogram blushed, and bowed as to his very best customer. Mr. Gammon came last; and bursting with disgust at the reception given to Mr. Delamere, coloured all over as he took off his hat, and with an expression of very anxious and pointed politeness, endeavoured to satisfy Mr. Delamere and his party, that there was at all events *one* in the train of Titmouse who had some pretensions to the character of a gentleman.

"Who *can* that last man be? He's a gentleman," inquired Sir Percival with an air of much surprise. "Mr. Gammon—a man who is lord-paramount at the Hall," replied one. "Gammon!—Is *that* Mr.——" echoed Delamere, with much interest; and as he turned round to look at Gammon, observed that Gammon was doing the same; on which both hastily turned away.

As the important day approached, each party *professed* complete confidence as to the result. The *Yorkshire Stingo* declared that it had authority for stating that Mr. Titmouse's majority would be at least three to one over Mr. Delamere—and that, too, in glorious defiance of the most lavish bribery and corruption, the most tyrannical intimidation, that had ever disgraced the annals of electioneering. In fact, it was presumption in Mr. Delamere to attempt to foist himself upon a borough with which he had no connection, and done with a wanton and malicious determination to occasion expense and annoyance to Mr.

Titmouse. The *York True Blue*, on the contrary, assured its readers that Mr. Delamere's prospects were of the brightest description—and though, by perhaps a small majority, yet he was sure of his election. He had been everywhere hailed with the greatest enthusiasm. Many of even Mr. Titmouse's tenantry had nobly volunteered their support to Mr. Delamere; and at Grilston, so long regarded as the very focus and hotbed of democracy, his success had surpassed the most sanguine expectations of his friends, and so forth. Then there was a sly and mischievous caution to the electors not to be led away by the ingenious and eloquent sophistries which might be expected from Mr. Titmouse at the hustings, on the day of nomination!! All this might be very well for the papers, and probably produce its impression upon those who, at a distance, are in the habit of relying upon them. But as for the actors—the parties concerned—Mr. Delamere was repeatedly assured by Mr. Crafty that a decent minority was the very utmost that could be expected; while Titmouse and his friends, on the other hand, were in a very painful state of uncertainty as to the issue: only Gammon, however, and perhaps one or two others, being acquainted with the true source of uneasiness and difficulty—viz., the abominable rapacity of the Quaint Club.

At length dawned the day which was to determine how far Yatton was worthy or unworthy of the boon which had been conferred upon it by the glorious Bill for giving Everybody Everything—which was to witness the maiden contest between the two hopeful scions of the noble and ancient houses of Dreddlinton and De la Zouch—on which it was to be ascertained whether Yatton was to be bought and sold, like any other article of merchandise, by a bitter old borough-monger; or to signalize itself by its spirit and independence, in returning one who avowed, and would support, the noble principles which secured the passing of the Great Bill which has been so often alluded to. As for my hero, Mr. Titmouse, it gives me pain to have to record—making even all due allowance for the excitement occasioned by so exhilarating an occasion—that there were scarcely two hours in the day during which he could be considered as sober. He generally left his bed about eleven o'clock in the morning—about two o'clock reached his committee-room—there he called for a bottle or two of soda-water, with brandy; and, thus supported, set out on his canvass, and never refused an invitation to take a glass of good ale at the houses which he visited. About the real business of the election—about his own true position and prospects—Gammon never once deigned to consult or instruct him; but had confined himself to the preparation of a very short and simple speech, to be delivered by Titmouse, if possible, from the hustings, and which he had made Titmouse copy out many times, and *promise* that he would endeavour to learn off by heart. He might as well have attempted to walk up the outside of the Monument.

Merrily rang the bells of Grilston church, by order of the vicar, the Reverend Gideon Fleshpot, who was a stanch Titmoussite, and had long cast a sort of sheep's eye upon the living of Yatton; for he was nearly twenty years younger than its present possessor, Dr. Tatham. What a bustle was there in the town by eight o'clock in the morning! All business was to be suspended for the day. Great numbers from the places adjacent began to pour into the town about that hour. It was soon seen who was the popular candidate—he whose colours were *yellow*; for wherever you went, yellow cockades, rosettes, and button-ties for the men, and yellow ribands for the girls, yellow flags and yellow placards with "Titmouse for Yatton!" met the eye. Mr. Delamere's colours were a deep blue, but were worn, I am sorry to say, by only one in four or five of those who were stirring about; and who, moreover, however respectable, and in appearance superior to the adherents of Titmouse, yet wore no such look of confidence and cheerfulness as they. From the bow window of the Hare and Hounds, Mr.

Delamere's head-quarters, streamed an ample and very rich blue silk banner, on which was worked, in white silk, the figure of a Bible, Crown, and Sceptre, and the words "Delamere for Yatton." This would have probably secured some little favourable notice from his sullen and bitter opponents, had they known that it had been the workmanship of some fifteen of as sweetly beautiful girls as could have been picked out of the whole county of York; and, by the way, 'tis a singular and melancholy sign of the times, that beauty, innocence, and accomplishment, are in England to be found uniformly arrayed on the side of tyranny and corruption against the people. Then Mr. Delamere's *band* was equal to three such as that of his opponent—playing with equal precision and power: and what was more, they played very bold, enlivening tunes as they paraded the town. There was one feature of the early proceedings of the day, that was rather singular and significant: viz., that though all the members of the formidable Quaint Club were stirring about, *not one of them wore the colours of either party*, though (between ourselves) each man had the colours of both parties in his pocket. They appeared studiously to abstain from a display of party feeling—though several of them *could* not resist a leering wink of the eye when the yellow band went clashing past them. They had, moreover, a band of their own, which went about the town preceded by their own standard—a very broad sheet of sky-blue, stretched between two poles, supported by two men: and the droll device it bore, was—an enormous man's face, with an intense squint, and two hands, with the thumbs of each resting on the nose, and the fingers spread out towards the beholder. It produced—as if seemed designed to produce—shouts of laughter wherever it made its appearance. Every member of the Quaint Club, however, wore a grave face as if they were the only persons who appreciated the nature of the exalted functions which they were about to exercise. No one could tell which way they intended to vote, though all expected that they were to come in at the last, and place the yellows in a triumphant majority of a hundred, at least. Though it had been a matter of notoriety that they were Mr. Titmouse's men, before Mr. Delamere appeared in the field; yet, *since* then, they had suddenly exhibited a politic and persevering silence and reserve, even among their personal friends and acquaintance. The yellow band performed one feat which was greatly applauded by the yellow crowd which attended them, and evidenced the delicacy by which those who guided their movements were actuated: viz., they frequently passed and re-passed Mr. Delamere's committee-room, playing that truly inspiriting air, "The Rogue's March." Then the yellows dressed up a poor old donkey in Mr. Delamere's colours, which were plentifully attached to the animal's ears and tail, and paraded him, with great cheering, before the doors of the Hare and Hounds, and Mr. Delamere's principal friends and adherents. Nay—one of the more vivacious of the crowd threw a stone at a little corner window of the blue committee-room, through which it went smashing on its way, till it hit upon the inkstand of calm Mr. Crafty, who sat alone in the little room, busy at work with pen, ink, and paper. He looked up for a moment, called for a fresh inkstand, and presently resumed his pen, as if nothing had happened.

The hustings were erected upon a very convenient and commodious green, at the southern extremity of the town; and thither might be seen, first on its way, a little after eleven o'clock, the procession of the popular candidate—Mr. Titmouse. Here and there might be heard, as he passed, the startling sounds of mimic ordnance, fired by little boys from housetops. As they passed the church, its bells rang their merriest peal; and, at a little distance further on, the little boys of Mr. Hic Hæc Hoc, each with a small rosette tied to his jacket, struck up a squeaking and enthusiastic "hurrah!" while from the upper windows, the young ladies (three in number) of Mrs. Hic Hæc Hoc's "establishment," waved their little white pocket-handkerchiefs. Next on their

way, they passed the "*Reverend*" Smirk Mudflint's chapel, which was in very queer contiguity to an establishment of a very queer character—in fact, adjoining it. Against the upper part of the chapel hung a device calculated to arrest, as it *did* arrest, universal attention—viz., an *inverted* copy of the New Testament; over it, the figure of a church turned upside down, with the point of its steeple resting on the word "*Revelation*;" and upon the aforesaid church stood proudly erect an exact representation of Mr. Smirk Mudflint's chapel, over which were the words—"Freedom of Opinion! and Truth Triumphant!" But I do not know whether another device, worked by Miss Mudflint—a skinny, tallow-faced, and flinty-hearted young lady of nine-and-twenty—was not still more striking and original; viz., a Triangle, and an Eye with rays, with the words—"Titmouse! Truth! Peace!" Three cheers for Mr. Mudflint were given here; and Mr. Mudflint bowed all round with an air of proud excitement—feeling, moreover, an intense desire to stop the procession and make a speech while opposite to his own little dunghill.

First in the procession marched a big fellow with one eye, bearing a flag, with a red cap on a pike, and the words, in large black characters—"Titmouse or Death!!!" "Let Tyrants Tremble!!!"—Then came the band, and next to them walked—Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq., dressed exactly as he was when he encountered in their canvass, the party of his opponent,—only that he wore a yellow rosette, attached to a button-hole on the left side of his drab great-coat. His protuberant light-blue eyes danced with delight, and his face was flushed with excitement. His hat was off and on every moment, in acknowledgment of the universal salutations which greeted him, and which so occupied him that he even forgot to use his eyeglass. On his left hand walked, wrapped up in a plain dark-hued great-coat, a somewhat different person—Mr. Gammon. The expression which his features wore was one of intense anxiety; and any tolerably close observer might have detected the mortification and disgust with which his eye occasionally glanced at, and was as suddenly withdrawn from, the figure of the grinning idiot beside him. Who do you think, reader, walked on Mr. Titmouse's right-hand side? Sir Harkaway Rotgut Wildfire, Baronet, whose keen political feelings, added to a sincere desire to secure a chance of his daughter's becoming the mistress of Yatton, had long ago obliterated all unkindly recollection of Mr. Titmouse's gross conduct on a former occasion, after having received, through the medium of Bloodsuck, senior, as a common friend, a satisfactory apology. Next walked Mr. Titmouse's mover and seconder, the "*Reverend*" Mr. Mudflint, and Going Gone, "*Esquire*." Then came Mr. Centipede, and Mr. Woodlouse, Mr. Grogram and Mr. Ginblossom; Mr. Gargle Glister and Mr. Barnabas Bloodsuck; and others of the leading friends of Mr. Titmouse, followed by some two hundred of others, two and two. Thus passed along the main street of Grilston, in splendid array, what might too truly have been called the *triumphal* procession of the popular candidate; his progress being accompanied by the music of his band, the acclamations of the excited and intelligent crowd, the waving of banners and flags below, and handkerchiefs and scarfs from the ladies at the windows, and desperate strugglings from time to time, on the part of the crowd, to catch a glimpse of Mr. Titmouse. Mr. Gammon had the day before judiciously hired ten pounds' worth of mob—a device alone sufficient to have made Mr. Titmouse the popular candidate, and it now told excellently; for the aforesaid ten pounds' worth disposed itself in truly admirable order, in front of the hustings—and, on Mr. Titmouse's making his appearance there, set up a sudden and enthusiastic shout, which rent the air, and was calculated to strike dismay into the heart of the enemy. Mr. Titmouse on gaining the hustings, changed colour visibly, and, coming in front, took off his glossy hat, and bowed repeatedly in all directions.

Mr. Delamere's procession was of a vastly superior description, yet too

palpably that of the unpopular candidate—every member of it, from first to last, having made up his mind to encounter incivility, and even insult, however really anxious to avoid the slightest occasion for it. The band was numerous, and played admirably. There was a profusion of gay and handsome flags and banners. Mr. Delamere walked next to the band, with a gallant bearing, a gay and cheerful smile, yet oft darkened by anxiety as he perceived indubitable symptoms of a disposition to rough treatment on the part of the crowd. On his right hand side walked Mr. St. Aubyn; on his left, Sir Percival Pickering, the late member for the borough. Following them came Mr. Gold, the banker, and Mr. Milnthorpe, an extensive and highly-respectable flour factor—these being Mr. Delamere's mover and seconder: and they were followed by at least three hundred others, two and two, all of substantial and respectable appearance, and most resolute air to boot. No amount of mob that day in Grilston would have ventured an attack in passing upon that stout-hearted body of yeomen. A great many white handkerchiefs were waved from the windows as Delamere passed along—waved by the hands of hundreds of fair creatures, whose hearts throbbed with fond fear lest an unoffending gentleman should be maltreated by the reckless mob. When Mr. Delamere approached a large bow window, opposite to the Town Hall, his heart began to beat quickly. There were four as beautiful and high-born young women as England could have produced, all gazing down upon him with eager and anxious looks. It was not they, however, who occasioned Mr. Delamere's emotion. He knew that in that room was Lady Dela Zouch—*his mother*; and he grew silent and excited as he approached it. One of the loveliest of the four as he stopped and with respectful bow looked up for an instant—Lady Alethea Lorymer—suddenly and quite unexpectedly stepped aside; and there stood revealed the figure of Lady De la Zouch. She would have waved her handkerchief, but that she required it to conceal her emotion. The lips of neither mother nor son moved; but their *hearts* uttered reciprocal benedictions—and Delamere passed on. As he neared the church, I regret to have it to put on record, but, at the bidding of the Reverend Gideon Fleshpot, the bell *tolled as for a funeral*!!

Could anything have been more lamentable and disgusting? If the sudden and unexpected sight of his mother had been calculated in any degree to subdue, for a moment, his feelings, what ensued within a minute or two afterwards was sufficient to excite his sternest mood; for as soon as ever the head of his procession became visible to the crowd on the green, there arose a tremendous storm of yelling, hooting, hissing, and groaning: and when Mr. Delamere made his appearance in front of the hustings, you might have imagined that you were witnessing the reception given to some loathsome miscreant mounting the gallows to expiate with his life a hideous and revolting crime. He advanced, nevertheless, with a smile of cheerful resolution and good-humour, though he changed colour a little; and, taking off his hat, bowed in all directions. Gracious heaven! what a contrast he presented to his popular rival, Mr. Titmouse, who stood grinning and winking to the wretches immediately underneath, evidently with a spiteful gratification at the treatment which his opponent was experiencing. Any one on the hustings or in the crowd had but to call out "Three cheers for Mr. Titmouse!" to be instantly obeyed; then "three *groans* for the young boroughmonger!" were responded to with amazing vehemence and effect. On the outskirts of the crowd were to be seen a great number of carriages, both close and open, principally occupied by ladies—and I need hardly say who was the favourite in *those* quarters. Then the rival bands moved continually about, playing well-known national airs; while the banners and flags, blue and yellow, heightened the exhilarating and picturesque effect of the whole. The hustings were strong and commodious; Mr. Titmouse and his friends stood on the right, Mr. Delamere and his friends on the left side.

And beside him stood his mover and seconder, Mr. Gold and Mr. Milnthorpe : the two late members ; and about twenty or thirty other gentlemen—the whole party forming such a strong contrast to their opponents, as must have challenged any one's observation in an instant. Titmouse stood in the centre, leaning (as he supposed) gracefully against the front bar ; on his right stood the burly slovenly figure of Sir Harkaway Rotgut Wildfire, with his big, bloated, blotchy, face : on Mr. Titmouse's left side stood his proposer, the "Reverend" Mr. Smirk Mudflint. His lean, sallow face wore a very disagreeable and bitter expression, which was aggravated by a sinister cast of one of his eyes. He was dressed in black with a white neckerchief and no shirt collars. Next to him stood Going Gone, Esq., Mr. Titmouse's seconder, with a ruddy complexion, light hair, a droll eye, and an expression of coarse but by no means ill-natured energy. Gammon stood immediately behind Titmouse, into whose ear he whispered frequently and anxiously. There were also the Reverend Gideon Fleshpot (though he evidently did not wish to make himself conspicuous), Mr. Glisten, Mr. Grogram, Mr. Woodlouse, Mr. Centipede, Mr. Ginblossom, Mr. Hic Hæc Hoc, the Messrs. Bloodsuck, father and son. The business of the day having been opened with the ordinary formalities by the returning officer, he earnestly besought the assembled multitude to remember that they were Englishmen, and to give both parties fair play, allowing everyone who might address them from the hustings, to be heard without serious interruption. It had been arranged between the two committees that Mr. Titmouse should be first proposed ; and the moment, therefore, that the returning officer ceased speaking, the "Reverend" Mr. Mudflint took off his hat and prepared to address the "electors ;" but he had to wait for at least a minute in order that the applause with which he had been greeted might subside, during which little anxious interval, he could not help directing towards his opponent a look of bitter exultation. He spoke with the self-possession, fluency, and precision of a practised public speaker. If the day's proceedings were to take their tone from that of the opening speech, 'twas a thousand pities that it fell to the lot of the "Reverend" Mr. Mudflint to deliver it. He had so clear a voice, spoke with such distinctness and deliberation, and amidst such silence, that every word he uttered was audible all over the crowd ; and anything more unchristian, uncourteous, unfair, towards his opponents, and calculated to excite towards them the hatred of the crowd, could hardly have been conceived ; in what offensive and indecent terms he spoke of the Established Church and its ministers ! of the aristocracy ("those natural tyrants," he said), and indeed of all the best and time-hallowed institutions of dear glorious old England—which might, by the way, well blush to own such a creature as he, as one entitled by birth to call himself one of her sons ! How he hailed the approaching downfall of "*priestcraft*" and "*kingcraft* !"—"A new light," he said, "was diffusing itself over benighted mankind—'twas the pure and steady light of REASON, and all filthy things were flying from before it" (immense cheers followed the announcement of so important and interesting a fact). "The Bible," he said, "was a book of excellent common sense ; and nothing but villainous priestcraft had attempted to torture and dislocate it into all sorts of fantastic mysteries, which led to rank idolatry and blasphemy, equally revolting to God and man." (Perceiving, from the coolness with which it was received, that this was going a little too rapidly ahead, he dropped that subject altogether, and soon regained the ear of his audience by descanting in very declamatory and inflammatory terms upon the resplendent victory which the people had recently gained in the glorious Bill for giving Everybody Everything.) "They had burst their bonds with a noble effort ; but their chains would be quickly re-riveted, unless they followed up their advantage, and never stopped short of crushing a heartless and tyrannical and insolent oligarchy ; unless the people were now true to

themselves, and returned to the House of Commons good men and true, to watch over the energies of reviving liberty, lest they should be strangled in their way—the remainder of the sentence was inaudible in the storm of applause which it excited). Under these circumstances Providence itself had pointed out an individual whom he was proud and happy to propose to their notice—(Here he turned and bowed to Mr. Titmouse, who, plucking off his hat, bobbed in return, and blushed, amidst the deafening cheers of all before them, to whom also he bowed repeatedly)—a gentleman who seemed, as it were, made for them; who, in his own person, might be said to afford a lively illustration of the regeneration of society—who, to borrow for a moment an absurd word from his opponents, had by a sort of *miracle* (with what an infernal emphasis he pronounced this word!) been placed where he was, in his present proud position; who had totally and happily changed the whole aspect of affairs in the neighbourhood, which had already become the scene of his profuse and yet discriminating generosity and hospitality; who stood in bright and bold relief from out a long gloomy line of ancestors, all of whom had lived and died in enmity to the people; also who had distinguished themselves by nothing except their bigotry and hatred of civil and religious liberty. Mr. Titmouse was the first of his ancient family to claim the proud title of—The Man of the People. (Here a voice called out, “three cheers for Mr. Titmouse!”—which were given spontaneously, and most effectively.) His ‘*address*’ was worthy of him—it did equal honour to his head and his heart (it is impossible to describe the smile which here just glanced over the countenance of Mr. Gammon), touching nothing that it did not adorn—at once bold, comprehensive, uncompromising!—He had had the felicity of enjoying the acquaintance, he might venture perhaps to say the friendship, of Mr. Titmouse, since he had taken up his abode at the home of his ancestors, and very proud he was to be able to say so. He could assure the electors, from his own personal knowledge of Mr. Titmouse, that they would have cause to be proud of their future representative—of the choice which they were about to make. (Here the worthy speaker had some sudden misgivings as to the display likely to be made by Titmouse, when it came to his turn to address the electors:—so he added in *rather* a subdued tone)—it was true that they might not have, in Mr. Titmouse, a magpie in the House (*laughter*), a mere chatterer—much cry and little wool; they had had enough of mere speechifiers at St Stephen’s—but they would have a good working member (*cheers*); one always at his post in the hour of danger (*cheers*); a good committeeman, and one whose princely fortune rendered him independent of party and of the blandishments of power. In the language of the ancient poet (!) Mr. Mudflint would exclaim on such an occasion, ‘*Facta, non verba quæro*’ (*great cheering*). And now a word for his opponent (*groans*). He was a mere puppet, held in the hands of someone out of sight (*laughter*)—it might be of a base old borough-monger (*groans*)—who sought to make Yatton a rotten borough (*hisses*), a stepping stone to ascendancy in the county (cries of ‘Will he, though, lad, eh?’), who would buy and sell them like slaves (*hisses*), and would never rest satisfied till he had restored the intolerable old vassalage of feudalism (groans and hisses here burst forth from that enlightened assemblage, at the bare idea of anything so frightful). He meant nothing personally offensive to the honourable candidate—but *was* he worthy of a moment’s serious notice? (*great laughter*). Had he an opinion of his own? (*loud laughter*). Had he not better, to use the language of a book that was much misunderstood, *tarry at Jerusalem (!!!) till his beard was grown*? Was he not, in fact, a nonentity, unworthy of a reasonable man’s serious notice? Was he not reeking from Oxford (*groans*), that hotbed of pedantic ignorance and venerable bigotry (*hootings*), surrounded by a dismal and lurid halo of superstition?” (*groaning and hooting*).

Finer and finer was Mr. Mudflint becoming every moment as he warmed with his subject—but unfortunately his audience was beginning very unequivocally to intimate that they were quite satisfied with what they had already heard. A cry, for instance, was heard—"The rest of my *discourse* next Sunday!"—for the crowd knew that they were being kept all this while from one of their greatest favourites, Mr. Going Gone, who had also himself been latterly rather frequently and significantly winking his eye at those before him, and shrugging his shoulders. Mr. Mudflint, therefore, with feelings of vivid vexation, pique, and envy, concluded rather abruptly by proposing Tittlebat Titmouse, Esquire, of Yatton, as a fit and proper person to represent them in Parliament. Up went hats into the air, and shouts of the most joyous and enthusiastic description rent the air for several minutes. Then took off his hat the jolly Mr. Going Gone—a signal for roars of laughter, and cries of coarse and droll welcome, in expectancy of fun. Nor were they disappointed. He kept them in good-humour and fits of laughter during the whole of his "address;" and though destitute of any pretence to refinement, I must at the same time say, that I could not detect any traces of ill-nature in it. He concluded by seconding the nomination of Mr. Titmouse, amidst tumultuous cheers; and, after waiting for some few minutes, in order that they might subside, Mr. Gold took off his hat, and essayed to address the crowd. Now he really was what he looked, an old man of unaffected and very great good-humour and benevolence; and that, too, was extensive and systematic. He had only the week before distributed soup, blankets, coals, and potatoes to two hundred poor families in the borough, even as he had done at that period of the year for many years before. No tale of distress, indeed, was ever told him in vain, unless palpably fictitious and fraudulent. The moment that his bare head, scantily covered with grey hairs, was visible, there arose, at a given signal from Mr. Barnabas Bloodsuck, a dreadful hissing and hooting from all parts of the crowd. If he appeared disposed to persevere in addressing the two or three immediately around him, that only infuriated the mob against the poor old man, who bore it all, however, with great good-humour and fortitude. But it was in vain. After some twenty minutes spent in useless efforts to make himself audible, he concluded, in mere dumb show, by proposing the Honourable Geoffry Lovel Delamere, at the mention of whose name there again arose a perfect tempest of howling, hissing, groaning, and hooting. Then Mr. Milnthorpe came forward, determined not to be "*put down*." He was a very tall and powerfully built man; bold and determined, with a prodigious power of voice, and the heart of a lion. "Now, lads, I'm ready to try which can tire the other out first!" he roared, in a truly stentorian voice, that was heard over all their uproar, which it *redoubled*. How vain the attempt! How ridiculous the challenge! Confident of his lungs, he smiled good-humouredly at the hissing and bellowing mass before him, and for half-an-hour persevered in his attempts to make himself heard. At length, however, without his having in the slightest degree succeeded, his pertinacity began to irritate the crowd, who, in fact, felt themselves being *bullied*, and that no crowd that ever I saw or heard of can bear for one instant; and *what is one against so many?* Hundreds of fists were held up and shaken at him. A missile of some sort or another was flung at him, though it missed him; and then the returning officer advised him to desist from his attempts, lest mischief should ensue; on which he shouted at the top of his voice, "I second Mr. Delamere!" and, amidst immense groaning and hissing, replaced his hat on his head, thereby owning himself vanquished; which the mob also perceiving, they burst into loud and long-continued laughter.

"Now, Mr. Titmouse!" said the returning officer, addressing him: on hearing whose words he turned as white as a sheet of paper, and felt very much disposed to be sick. He pulled out of his coat-pocket a well-worn little roll of paper, on

which was the speech which Mr. Gammon had prepared for him, as I have already intimated; and with a shaking hand unrolled it, casting at its contents a glance—momentary and despairing. What then would that little fool have given for memory, voice, and manner enough to “speak the speech that had been set down for him!” He cast a dismal look over his shoulder at Mr. Gammon, and took off his hat—Sir Harkaway clapping him on the back, exclaiming, “Now for’t, lad—have at ’em and away—never fear!” The moment that he stood bare-headed, and prepared to address the writhing mass of faces before him, he was greeted with a prodigious shout—hats, some waved, others flung into the air—and it was two or three minutes before the uproar abated in the least. With fearful rapidity, however, every species of noise and interruption ceased—and a perfect silence prevailed. The sea of eager excited faces—all turned towards *him*—was a spectacle that might for a moment have shaken the nerves of even a *man*—had he been “unaccustomed to public speaking.” The speech, which—brief and simple as it was—he had never been able to make his own, even after copying it out half-a-dozen times, and trying to learn it off for an hour or two daily during the preceding fortnight, he had now utterly forgotten; and he would have given a hundred pounds to retire at once from the contest, or sink unperceived under the floor of the hustings.

“Begin! begin!” whispered Gammon earnestly. “Ya—a—s—but—what shall I say?” stammered Titmouse. “Your speech”—answered Gammon impatiently. “I—I—’pon my—soul—I’ve—forgot every word of it?” “Then *read* it,” said Gammon, in a furious whisper—“Good God, you’ll be hissed off the hustings!—Read from the paper, do you hear?”—he added, almost gnashing his teeth.

Matters having come to this fearful issue, “Gentlemen,” commenced Mr. Titmouse faintly! —“Hear him! Hear, hear!—Hush! Shy sh!” cried the impatient and expectant crowd.

Now, I happen to have a shorthand writer’s notes of every word uttered by Titmouse, together with an account of the reception it met with: and I shall here give the reader, first, Mr. Titmouse’s *real*, and secondly, Mr. Titmouse’s *supposed* speech, as it appeared two days afterwards in the columns of the *Yorkshire Stingo*.

“Look on *this* picture———and on *THIS*!”

Mr. Titmouse’s ACTUAL Speech.

“GENTLEMEN,—Most uncommon, unaccustomed as I am (*cheers*)—happy—memorable,—proudest—high honour—unworthy (*cheering*)—day of my life—important crisis (*cheers*)—day gone by; and arrived—too late (*cheering*)—civil and religious liberty all over the world (*immense cheering, led off by Mr. Mudflint*). Yes, gentlemen—I would observe—it is unnecessary to say—passing of that truly glorious Bill—charter—no mistake—Britons never shall be slaves (*enthusiastic cheers*)—Gentlemen, unaccustomed as I am to address an assembly of this—a-hem! (*hear! hear! hear! and cheers*)—civil and religious liberty all over the world (*cheers*)—yet the tongue can feel where the heart cannot express the (*cheers*)—so help me—!

Mr. Titmouse’s REPORTED Speech.

“Silence having been restored, Mr. Titmouse said, that he feared it was but too evident that he was unaccustomed to scenes so exciting as the present one—that was one source of his embarrassment; but the greatest was, the enthusiastic reception with which he was honoured, and of which he owned himself quite unworthy (*cheers*). He agreed with the gentleman who had proposed him in so very able and powerful a speech (*cheers*), that we had arrived at a crisis in our national history (*cheering*)—a point at which it would be ruin to go back, while to stand still was impossible (*cheers*); and, therefore, there was nothing for it but to go forward (*great cheering*). He looked upon the passing of the Bill for giving Every-

universal suffrage and cheap and enlightened equality, (*cries of 'that's it, lad!'*)—which can never fear to see established in this country—(*cheers*)—if only true to—industrious classes and corn-laws—yes, gentlemen, I say corn-laws—for I am of op—(*hush! cries of 'ay, lad, what dost say about THEM?'*) working out the principles which conduced to the establishment a—a—a—civil and religious liberty of the press! (*cheers!*) and the working classes (*hush!*)—Gentlemen, unaccustomed as I am—well—at any rate—will you—I say—*will* you? (*vehement cries of 'No! No! Never!'*) unless you are true to yourselves! Gentlemen, without going into—Vote by Ballot (*cheers*) and quarterly Parliaments (*loud cheering*)—three polar stars of my public conduct—(here the great central banner was waved to and fro, amidst enthusiastic cheering)—and reducing the overgrown Church Establishment to a—difference between me and my honourable opponent (*loud cheers and groans*), I live among you (*cheers*)—spend my money in the borough (*cheers*)—no business to come here (*No, no!*)—right about, close borough (*hisses!*)—patient attention, which I will not further trespass upon (*hear! hear! and loud cheering*)—full explanation—rush early to the—base, bloody, and brutal (*cheers*)—poll triumphant—extinguish for ever (*cheers*).—Gentlemen, these are my sentiments—wish you many happy—re—hem! a—hem—and by early displaying a determination to—(*cries of 'we will! we will!'*)—eyes of the whole country upon you—crisis of our national representation—patient attention—latest day of my life.—Gentlemen, yours truly—”

body Everything, as establishing an entirely new order of things (*cheers*), in which the people had been roused to a sense of their being the only legitimate source of power (*cheering*). They had, like Samson, though weakened by the cruelty and torture of his tyrants, bowed down and broken into pieces the gloomy fabric of aristocracy. The words “Civil and Religious Liberty” were now no longer a by-word and a reproach (*cheers*); but, as had been finely observed by the gentleman who had so eloquently proposed him to their notice, the glorious truth had gone forth to the ends of the earth, that no man was under any responsibility for his opinions or his belief, any more than for the shape of his nose (*loud cheers*). A spirit of tolerance, amelioration, and renovation was now abroad, actively engaged in repairing our defective and dilapidated constitution, the relic of a barbarous age—with some traces of modern beauty, but more of ancient ignorance and unsightliness (*cheers*). The great Bill he alluded to had roused the masses into political being (*immense cheering*), and made them sensible of the necessity of keeping down a rapacious and domineering oligarchy (*groans*). Was not the liberty of the press placed now upon an intelligible and imperishable basis?—Already were its purifying and invigorating influences perceptible (*cheering*)—and he trusted that it would never cease to direct its powerful energies to the demolition of the many remaining barriers to the improvement of mankind (*cheers*). The corn-laws must be repealed, the taxes must be lowered, the army and navy reduced; vote by ballot and universal suffrage conceded, and the quarterly meeting of Parliament secured. Marriage must be no longer fenced about by religious ceremonials (*cheers*). He found that there were three words on his banner, which were worth a thousand speeches—*Peace, Retrenchment, Reform*—which, as had been happily observed by the gentleman who had so ably proposed him—”

[And so on for a column more ; in the course of which there were really so many flattering allusions to the opening speech of the proposer of Titmouse, that it has often occurred to me as probable, that the "Reverend" Mr. Mudflint had supplied the above report of Mr. Titmouse's speech.]

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. TITMOUSE, on concluding, made a great number of very profound bows, and replaced his hat upon his head, amidst prolonged and enthusiastic cheering, which, on Mr. Delamere's essaying to address the crowd, was suddenly converted into a perfect hurricane of hissing ; like as we now and then find a shower of rain suddenly changed into hail. Mr. Delamere stood the pitiless pelting of the storm with calmness, resolution, and good-humour. Ten minutes had elapsed, and he had not been allowed to utter one syllable audible to any one beyond four or five feet from him. Every fresh effort he made to speak caused a renewal of the uproar, and many very offensive and opprobrious epithets were applied to him. Surely this was disgraceful, disgusting ! What had he done to deserve such treatment ? Had he been guilty of offering some gross indignity and outrage to every person present, individually, could he have fared worse than he did ! He had conducted his canvass with scrupulous and exemplary honour and integrity—with the utmost courtesy to all parties, whether adverse or favourable. He was surely not deficient in those qualities of head and of heart—of personal appearance, even, which usually secure man favour with his fellows. *Who* could lay *anything* to his charge—except that he had ventured to solicit the suffrages of the electors of Yatton, in competition with Mr. Titmouse ? If men of a determined character and of princely means have to calculate upon such brutal usage as this, can those who sanction or perpetrate it wonder at bribery and other undue means being resorted to, in absolute self-defence ? Is it meant to deter any one from coming forward that has not a forehead of brass, leather lungs, and heart of marble ? After upwards of a quarter of an hour had been thus consumed, without Mr. Delamere's having been permitted to utter two consecutive sentences, though he stood up against it patiently and gallantly, the returning officer, who had often appealed to them in vain, earnestly besought Mr. Titmouse to use his influence with the crowd, in order to secure Mr. Delamere a moment's hearing.

"'Pon my life—I—eh?" quoth Titmouse. "A likely thing ! He'd do it for *me*, wouldn't he ? Every man for himself—all fair at an election, eh, Gammon ?"

"Do it, sir !" whispered Gammon indignantly—"do it, and instantly—or you deserve to be kicked over into the crowd !" Titmouse, on this, took off his hat with a very bad grace, and addressing the crowd, said—"I—I—suppose you'll hear what he's got to say for himself, gents—" But all was in vain : "Off ! off ! No !—Go home !—ah !—ah !—a—a—a—h !—St !—St !—Get away home with you, you young borough-monger !—a—a—h !" came in louder and fiercer tones from the mob. Yet Mr. Delamere did not like to give up without another and a desperate effort to catch the ear of the mob ; but while he was in the act of raising his right hand, and exclaiming—"Gentlemen, only a word or two—I pledge my honour that I will not keep you three minutes"—some barbarous miscreant from the body of the crowd aimed at him a stone, not a very large one to be sure, yet flung with very considerable force, and hitting him just about the centre of the upper lip, which it cut open. He instantly turned pale, and applied to it his white pocket-handkerchief, which

was speedily stained with blood which issued copiously from the wound, and must have greatly gratified the crowd!—Still the gallant young fellow stood his ground with firmness, and the smile which he endeavoured to assume was enough to have brought tears into one's eyes to witness. The instant that Gammon had seen the stone take effect, he rushed over towards where Mr. Delamere stood amidst his agitated friends, who were dissuading him from persevering in his attempt to address the crowd—

"You are severely hurt, sir!" exclaimed Gammon, with much agitation, taking off his hat with an air of earnest and respectful sympathy. Then he turned with an air of excitement towards the crowd, who seemed shocked into silence by the incident which had taken place, and where uttering increasing cries of "shame! shame! shame!"

"Shame?—shame, *shame*, indeed, gentlemen"—he exclaimed vehemently—"Where is that atrocious miscreant? In the name of Mr. Titmouse, who is too much agitated to address you himself, I conjure you to secure that abominable ruffian, and let him be brought to justice! If not, Mr. Titmouse protests solemnly that he will withdraw from the election."

"Bravo, Titmouse! bravo! Spoke like a man!" exclaimed several voices. A desperate struggle was soon perceived about that quarter where the man who flung the stone must have been standing; he had been seized, and being in a trice most severely handled, a couple of men almost throttled him with the tightness of their grasp round his neck—these two the very men who had encouraged him to perpetrate the outrage!—and, amidst a shower of kicks and blows, he was hauled off, and deposited, half dead, in the cage.

"Three cheers for Delamere!" cried a voice from the crowd; and never had a more vehement shout issued from them than in response to that summons.

"Delamere! Delamere!—Hear him!—Speak out!—Delamere! Delamere!" cried a great number of voices, of people growing more and more excited as they beheld his handkerchief becoming suffused with blood. But he was not in a condition then to respond to their call. He was suffering really not a little pain; and moreover, his feelings had for a moment—just for a moment—given way, when he adverted to the possibility that Lady De la Zouch might have witnessed the outrage, or received exaggerated account of it. Mr. St. Aubyn, however, stood forward in Mr. Delamere's stead—and in a very feeling and judicious but brief address, roused the feelings of the crowd to a high pitch of sympathy for Mr. Delamere, who stood beside him, hat in hand—vehemently, and at length successfully, struggling to repress his rising emotions. If only one out of a hundred of those present had had a vote, this little incident might have changed the fact of the election. The returning officer then proceeded to call for a show of hands, on which a very great number were held up in favour of Mr. Titmouse; but when Mr. Delamere's name was called, it really seemed as if every one present had extended both his hands—there could be no mistake, on room for doubt. Titmouse turned as pale as a sheet, and gazed with an expression of ludicrous consternation at Gammon, who also looked, in common indeed with his whole party, not a little disconcerted. The returning officer, having procured silence, declared that the choice of the electors had fallen upon Mr. Delamere, on which a tremendous cheering followed, which lasted for several minutes; and, luckily recollecting the utter nullity of a show of hands as a test or evidence, either way, of the result of the election, Mr. Gammon directed Mudflint formally to demand a poll on behalf of Mr. Titmouse; on which the returning officer announced that the poll would take place at eight o'clock the next morning: and thereupon the day's proceedings closed. Mr. Delamere, in a very few words, returned thanks to the electors for the honour which they had conferred upon him, and entreated them to go early to the poll. He and his friends then left the hustings. His procession quickly formed; his band struck

up with extra ordinary energy and spirit—" *See the Conquering Hero comes!*" but the rolling of the drums, the clashing of cymbals, the rich deep tones of the bassoons, trombones, and French horns, and clear and lively tones of flute and clarionette, were quite overpowered by the acclamations of the crowd which attended them to his committee-room. Sir Percival Pickering, throwing open the bow-window of the committee-room, addressed a word or two to the dense crowd, and then, having given three lusty cheers they withdrew. A glass of wine and water quickly re freshed the spirits of Mr. Delamere, and a surgeon having arrived found it necessary to dress the wound with much care, for the cut was considerable; in fact, the upper lip was partially laid open; and he declared it almost impossible for Mr. Delamere to make his appearance out of doors on the morrow. As for Mr. Crafty, as soon as he heard what had taken place, he uttered, as he felt bound to do, a few casual expressions of sympathy; but what passed through his *thoughts*, as he resumed his seat before his papers, was—"What a pity that all those fellows had not had votes, and that the poll had not commenced *instantly*!" The truly unexpected issue of the day's proceedings, while it elevated the spirits of all Mr. Delamere's friends, produced only one effect upon the imperturbable Mr. Crafty; he strongly suspected that the other side would probably be resorting during the night to measures of a desperate and unscrupulous description, in order to counteract the unfavourable impression calculated to be effected by the defeat of Mr. Titmouse at the show of hands. As for that gentleman, by the way, he became very insolent towards Gammon on reaching the committee-room, and protested, with fury in his face, that it had all been brought about by Mr. Gammon's "cursed officious meddling with Mr. Titmouse's name before the mob after the stone had been thrown;" on hearing which, "Go on to the Hall, sir, dine, and get drunk if you choose," said Gammon, bitterly and peremptorily; "I shall remain here all night. Powerful as are your energies, they require relaxation after the fatigues of the day!" and with a very *decisive*, but not violent degree of force, Titmouse was in a twinkling in the outer committee-room. Mr. Gammon had, indeed, as much serious work before him that night as Mr. Crafty, and prepared for secret and decisive action every whit as calmly and effectively as he. Mr. Crafty's arrangements were admirable. During the day he had parcelled out the borough into a number of small departments, each of which he committed to some steady and resolute friend of Mr. Delamere, who was to look after every elector in his division about whom there was the least fear, in respect either of apprehended violent abduction, or of treachery. These gentlemen were to be relieved at intervals; and from one to the other of them, perpetually were the personal agents of Crafty to go their rounds, in order to see that all was right, and carry any intelligence to head-quarters. Then others were intrusted with the ticklish and tiresome duty of watching the movements of the enemy in quarters where Crafty had sure information of intended operations during the night. Complete arrangements had been made, also, for bringing up voters to the poll at the exact times, and in the numbers, and in the manner, which might on the morrow be determined on by Mr. Crafty. Names were noted down of those to whom the bribery oath was to be administered. Prudent as were these precautions, they did not entirely prevent the mischief against which they were levelled. As the night wore on, evidence was, from time to time, brought in to Mr. Crafty that the enemy were at work—at their expected tricks; *e. g.*—

"Jacob Joliffe is missing. Wife *says* she knows nothing about him. *Inquire.*"

"Send at least a couple of men to watch Peter Jiggins, or he'll be out of the way when he's wanted."

"Haste—haste. G. Atkins and Adam Hutton, both safe ten minutes ago,

are off; enticed out into a post-chaise—gone towards York.—(Half-past eleven.)

"Send some one to the Jolly Snobs to watch the treating going on.—*Most important.* Mr. Titmouse has been there, and drunk a glass of rum with them."

Then more mysterious missives made their appearance from Mr. Crafty's own familiars.

"Q. C. S. H. O.—12."—(*i.e.*, "The Quaint Club still holds out.—Twelve o'clock.")

"Q. C. G. W.— $\frac{1}{2}$ past 1."—(*i.e.*, "The Quaint Club are *going wrong*.—Half-past one o'clock.")

"S. B.; G. O.   +   H. $\frac{1}{4}$ to 2."—(*i.e.*, "I have seen Bran, Gammon offers ten pounds, in addition to the ten pounds already given.—They hesitate.—A quarter to two o'clock.")

" $\frac{3}{\text{heard}}$ & S. B. & M. w. B. O. Q. C.—12—3."—(*i.e.*, "Three of our people have just overheard *and seen* Bloodsuck and Mudflint, with Bran, offering the Quaint Club *twelve* pounds.—Three o'clock.")

"Q. C. G. R. w. Y. & C. T. T. Y. M. S. I.—4."—(*i.e.*, "The Quaint Club are getting restive with *you*, and coming to terms with Titmouse. You must stir instantly.—Four o'clock.")

" $\Delta\Delta$.  10 m. 4."—These mysterious symbols caused Mr. Crafty instantly to bestir himself. He changed colour a *little*, and went into the adjoining room. The meaning of the communication was—*Great danger to both parties.*

In the adjoining room, where two candles were burning down in their very sockets, and the fire nearly out, were some four or five trusty friends of Mr. Delamere—gentlemen who had placed themselves entirely at Mr. Crafty's service throughout the night. When he entered, they were all nearly asleep, or at least dozing. Beckoning two of them into his own room, he instructed one of them to go and plant himself openly, as conspicuously as possible, near the door of Mr. Titmouse's committee-room, so as not to fail of being recognized by any one leaving or entering it, as a well-known friend of Mr. Delamere's; in fact, they were to discover that their motions were watched. The other he instructed to act similarly opposite the door of a small house in a narrow court—the residence, in fact, of Ben Bran, where all the night's negotiations with the Quaint Club had been carried on. Immediately afterwards, Mr. Crafty felt it his duty, as between man and man, to warn his opponent of the mortal peril in which he was placed; and found means to convey the following note into the committee-room where Mr. Gammon and one or two others were sitting:—

"Take care!! You are deceived! betrayed! Q. C. is sold out and out to the *Blues*!! And part of the bargain, that B. B. shall betray you into bribery in the presence of witnesses—not *one man* of the club safe; this have *just learnt* from the wife of one of them. From a well-wishing friend, but *obligated* to vote (against his conscience) for the Blues.

"P.S.—Lord D. in the town with lots of *the needful*, and doing business sharply."

While Mr. Gammon and his companions were canvassing this letter, in came the two gentlemen who had been watched, in the way I have stated, from Ben Bran's house to Mr. Titmouse's committee-room, pale and agitated, with intelligence of that fact. Though hereat Gammon's colour deserted his cheek, he affected to treat the matter very lightly, and laughed at the idea of being deluded by such boy's play. If Lord De La Zouch—said he—had hired

Crafty only to play tricks like *these*, he might as well have saved the trouble and expense. Here a slight bustle was heard at the door; and the ostler made his appearance, saying that a man had just given him what he produced to Mr. Gammon; who, taking from the ostler a dirty and ill-folded paper, read as follows:—

"To Squire Titmouse, you Are All Wrong, the Blues is *wide* Awake All Night and nos all, Lord Dillysough about with One hundred Spies; And look Out for traitors in the Camp. A friend or Enemy as you Will, but loving Fair Play."

"Poh!" exclaimed Gammon, flinging it on the table contemptuously.

Now, I may as well mention here, that about nine o'clock in the evening, Mr. Parkinson brought to Crafty *sure* intelligence that a very zealous and influential person, who was entirely in the confidence of the enemy, had come to him a little while before, and candidly disclosed the very melancholy position of his financial affairs; and Mr. Parkinson happened to be in a condition to verify the truth of the man's statement, that there was a writ out against him for £250, and unless he could meet it he would have to quit the county before daybreak, and his very promising prospects in business would be utterly ruined. Mr. Parkinson happened to know these matters professionally; and, in short, Crafty was given to understand, that so disgusted was Mr. M'Do'em with the Whig principles (his inexorable creditor being a Whig) and practices, such as the bribery, treating, and corruption at that moment going on, that—his conscience pricked him—and—ahem!—the poor penitent was ready to make all the amends in his power by discovering the villainy to its intended victims. Crafty, having felt the ground pretty safe underneath him, took upon himself to say, that Mr. M'Do'em need be under no further apprehension as to his pecuniary liabilities; but, in the meanwhile, he would certainly wish for a little *evidence* of the *bonâ fides* of his present conduct.

"Come," quoth M'Do'em, after receiving a pregnant wink from Mr. Crafty—"send some one whom you can rely upon with me *immediately*, to do as I bid him—and let him tell you."

No sooner said than done. A trusty managing clerk of Mr. Parkinson's forthwith accompanied M'Do'em on a secret expedition. * * *

They stood at a window with a broken pane. 'Twas a small ill-furnished kitchen, and in the corner, close to the fire, sat smoking a middle-aged man, in a paper cap. Opposite to him sat two persons, in very earnest conversation with him. They were Mr. Mudflint and Mr. Bloodsuck, junior. "Come, come, *that's* decidedly unreasonable," quoth the former. "No, sir, it *a'n't*. I'm an independent man!—It quite cut me to the heart, I 'sure you, sir, to see Master Delamere so dreadfully used—my good missus, *that's* in bed, says to me—says she—" "But what had Mr. Titmouse to do with it, you know?" said Mudflint, taking out of his pocket a bit of crumpled paper, at which the man he addressed gazed listlessly, shook his head, and exclaimed, "*No, it won't do*—He didn't deserve such treatment, poor young gentleman." (Here Bloodsuck and Mudflint whispered—and the latter, with a very bad grace, produced a second bit of crumpled paper.) "*That's* something like"—said the man, rather more good-humouredly. "It's *sartain* Mr. Titmouse had nothing to do with it—" "To be sure not!—Now, mind, by a quarter past eight—eh?" inquired Mudflint very anxiously, and somewhat sullenly. "I'm a man of my word—no one can say I ever broke it in earnest; and as for a straightforward bit o' business like this, I say, I'm your man—so here's my hand." * * * "Don't *that* look rather like business?" inquired M'Do'em in a whisper, after they had lightly stepped away.—"But come along!" * * *

After another similar scene, the two returned to the Hare and Hounds, and the matter was satisfactorily settled between Crafty and M'Do'em—one

hundred down, and the rest on the morning after the election. He was to *poll for Titmouse*, and that, too, early in the day; and be as conspicuous and active as possible in his exertions in behalf of that gentleman—to appear, in short, one of his most staunch and confidential supporters. Whether Lord De la Zouch or his son would have sanctioned such conduct as this, had they had an inkling of it, I leave to the reader to conjecture; but Crafty was easy about the matter—’twas only, in *his* opinion, “manœuvring:” and all weapons are fair against a burglar or highwayman; all devices against a swindler. M’Do’em gave Crafty a list of nine voters at Grilston who had received five pounds a-piece; and enabled him to discover a case of wholesale *treating*, brought home to one of the leading members of Mr. Titmouse’s committee. Well, this worthy capped all his honorable services by hurrying in to Gammon, some quarter of an hour after he had received the second anonymous letter, and with a perfect appearance of consternation, after carefully shutting the door and eyeing the window, faltered that all was going wrong—traitors were in the camp; that Lord De la Zouch had *bought every man of the Quaint Club two days before at thirty pounds a-head!* half already paid down, the rest to be paid on the morning of the *fifteenth day after Parliament had met*—(M’Do’em said he did not know what that meant, but Gammon was more influenced and alarmed by it than anything that had happened;)—that *Ben Bran was playing false*, having received a large sum—though how much M’Do’em had not yet learned—as head-money from Lord De la Zouch; and that if one single farthing were after that moment paid or promised to any single member of the club, either by Mr. Titmouse, or any one on his behalf, they were all delivered, bound hand and foot, into the power of Lord De la Zouch, and at his mercy. That so daring and yet artful was Lord De la Zouch, that his agents had attempted to tamper with even *him*, M’Do’em! but so as to afford him not the least hold of them. Moreover, he knew a fellow townsman who would, despite all his promises to the Liberal candidate, poll for Delamere: but nothing should induce him—M’Do’em—to disclose the name of that person, on account of the peculiar way in which he M’Do’em—had come to know the fact.

On hearing all this, Gammon calmly made up his mind for the worst; and immediately resolved to close all further negotiation with the Quaint Club. To have acted otherwise would have been mere madness, and courting destruction. The more he reflected on the exorbitant demand of the Quaint Club—and so *suddenly* exorbitant, and enforced by such an impudent sort of quiet pertinacity, the more he saw to corroborate—had that occurred to him as necessary—the alarming intelligence of M’Do’em. Mr. Gammon concealed much of his emotion; but he ground his teeth together with the effort. Towards six o’clock, there was a room full of the friends and agents of Titmouse; to whom Gammon, despite all that had happened, and which was known to only four or five of those present, gave a highly encouraging account of the day’s prospects, but impressed upon them all with infinite energy the necessity for caution and activity. A great effort was to be made to head the poll from the first, in order at once to do away with the *prestige* of the show of hands; and the “friends of Mr. Titmouse” (*i.e.*, the ten pounds’ worth of mob), were to be in attendance round the polling-booth at seven o’clock, and remain there the rest of the day, in order, by their presence, to encourage and protect (!) the voters of Mr. Titmouse. This and one or two other matters having been thus arranged, Mr. Gammon, who was completely exhausted with his long labour, retired to a bedroom, and directed that he should without fail be called in one hour’s time. As he threw himself on the bed, with his clothes on, and extinguished his candle, he had at least the consolation of reflecting, that nine of the enemy’s

staunchest voters were safely stowed away (as he imagined), and that seven or eight of the *accessibles*, pledged to Mr. Delamere, had promised to reconsider the matter.

If Gammon had taken the precaution of packing the front of the polling-booth in the way I have mentioned, Mr. Crafty had not overlooked the necessity of securing efficient protection for his voters; and between seven and eight o'clock no fewer than between four and five hundred stout yeomen, tenants of Lord De la Zouch and others of the surrounding nobility and gentry, made their appearance in the town, and insinuated themselves into the rapidly accumulating crowd; many of them, however, remaining at large, at the command of Mr. Delamere's committee, in order, when necessary, to secure safe access to the poll for those who might require such assistance. It was strongly urged upon Mr. Crafty to bring up a strong body of voters at the commencement, in order to head the polling at the end of the first hour. "Not the least occasion for it," said Crafty quietly—"I don't care a straw for it: in a small borough no end can be gained, where the voters are so few in number that every man's vote is secured long beforehand, to a dead certainty. There's no *prestige* to be gained or supported. No. Bring up *first* all the distant and most uncertain voters—secure them early while you have time and opportunity. Again, for the first few hours poll languidly; it *may* render the enemy over easy. You may perhaps make a sham *rush* of about twenty or thirty between twelve and one o'clock, to give them the idea that you are doing your very best. Then fall off, poll a man now and then only, and see what *they* will do, how *they* are playing off their men. If you can hang back till late in the day, then direct, very secretly and cautiously, the bribery oath and the questions to be put to each of their men as they come up; and, while you are thus picking their men off, pour in your own before they are aware of your game, and the hour for closing the poll *may* perhaps arrive while some dozen or so of their men are unpolled. But above all, gentlemen," said Crafty, "every one to his own work only. One thing at a time throughout the day, which is quite long enough for all you have to do. Don't try to bring up several at once; if you have *one* ready, take him up at once and have done with him. Don't give yourselves the least concern about ascertaining the numbers that *have* polled, but only those that have *yet* to be polled: the returns I will look after. Let those stand behind the check-clerks, who are best acquainted with the names, persons, and circumstances of the voters who come up, and can detect imposture of any sort before the vote is recorded *and the mischief done*. The scoundrel may be thus easily *kept off* the poll-books, whom it may cost you a thousand pounds hereafter to attempt to remove, in vain."

The day was bright and frosty; and long before eight o'clock the little town was all alive with music, flags, cheering, and crowds passing to and fro. The polling-booth was commodious and well constructed, with a view to the most rapid access and departure of the voters. By eight o'clock there was more than a couple of thousand persons collected before the booth; and, significant evidence of the transient nature of yesterday's excitement, the yellow colours appeared as five to one. Just before eight o'clock up drove Mr. Titmouse in a dog-cart, from which he jumped out amidst the cheers of almost all present, and skipped on to the bench behind his own check-clerk, with the intention of remaining there all day to acknowledge the votes given for him. But Mr. Delamere, with a just delicacy and pride, avoided making his appearance either at or near the booth, at all events till the voting was over. The first vote given was that of Obadiah Holt, the gigantic landlord of the Hare and Hounds, and for Mr. Delamere, the event being announced by a tremendous groan; but no one ventured any personal incivility to the laughing giant that passed through them. A loud cheer, as well as a sudden bobbing of the head on the part of

Titmouse, announced that the second vote had been recorded for him ; and, indeed, during the next twenty minutes he polled fifteen for Delamere's eight. At *nine* o'clock the poll stood thus—

Titmouse	31
Delamere	18
Majority	13

Steadily adhering to Mr. Crafty's system, at *ten* o'clock the poll stood—

Titmouse	53
Delamere	29
Majority	24

At *eleven* o'clock—

Titmouse	89
Delamere	41
Majority	48

At *twelve* o'clock—

Titmouse	94
Delamere	60
Majority	34

At *one* o'clock—

Titmouse	129
Delamere	84
Majority	45

At this point they remained stationary for some time ; but Delamere had polled all his *worst* votes, Titmouse almost all his *best*. The latter had, indeed, only *seventeen* more in reserve, independently of the Quaint Club, and the still neutral *twenty* accessibles ; while Delamere had yet, provided his promises stood firm, and none of his men were hocussed or kidnapped, forty-five good men and true—and some faint hopes, also, of the aforesaid *twenty* accessibles. For a quarter of an hour, not one man came up for either party ; but at length two of Delamere's leading friends came up, with faces full of anxiety, and recorded their votes for Delamere, amidst loud laughter. About half-past one o'clock, a prodigious—and I protest that it was both to Lord De la Zouch and Mr. Delamere a totally unexpected—rush was made on behalf of Delamere, consisting of the *twenty accessibles* ; who, in the midst of yelling, and hissing, and violent abuse, voted one after another for Delamere. Whether or not a strong pressure had been resorted to by some zealous and powerful gentlemen in their neighbourhood, but entirely independent of Mr. Delamere, I know not ; but the fact was as I have stated. At *two* o'clock the poll stood thus—

Titmouse	145
Delamere	134
Majority	11

Thus Titmouse had then polled within one of his positive reserve, and yet was only eleven above Delamere, who had still *fifteen* men to come up !

"Where is the Quaint Club!" began to be more and more frequently and earnestly asked among the crowd: but no one could give a satisfactory answer; and more than one conjecture was hazarded, as to the possibility of their coming up under *blue* colours. But—*where were they?* Where they watching the state of the poll, and under marching orders for the moment when the enemy should be at his extremity? 'Twas indeed a matter of exquisite anxiety—Between two o'clock and a quarter past, not one voter was polled on either side; and the crowd, wearied with their long labours of hissing and shouting, looked dispirited, listless, exhausted. By-and-by Mr. Gammon, and Messrs. Bloodsuck (senior and junior), Muddfint, Woodlouse, Centipede, Ginblössom, Going Gone, and others, made their appearance in the booth, around Titmouse. They all looked sour, and depressed, and fatigued. Their faces were indeed enough to sadden and silence the crowd. Were Mr. Titmouse's forces exhausted?—"Where's the Quaint Club?" roared out a man in the crowd, addressing Mr. Gammon who smiled wretchedly in silence. The reason of his then appearing at the polling-booth was certainly the one first suggested; but he had another; for he had received information that within a short time Dr. Tatham, and also fourteen of the Yotton tenantry, were coming up to the poll. Mr. Gammon, accordingly, had not stood there more than five minutes, before a sudden hissing and groaning announced the approach of a blue—in fact, it proved to be little Dr. Tatham, who had been prevented from earlier coming up, through attendance on one or two sick parishioners, in different parts of the neighbourhood, to whom he had been summoned unexpectedly. It cost the quiet stout-hearted old man no little effort, and occasioned him a little discomposure, elbowed, and jolted, and insulted as he was; but at length there he stood before the poll-clerks—who did not require to ask him his name or residence. Gammon gazed at him with folded arms, and a stern and sad countenance. Presently, inclining slightly towards Muddfint, he seemed to whisper in that gentleman's ear—and—"Administer the bribery oath," said he to the returning officer eagerly.

"Sir," exclaimed that functionary in a low tone, with amazement—"the bribery oath—To Dr. Tatham? Are you in earnest?" "Do your duty, sir!" replied Muddfint, in a bitter insulting tone.

"I regret to say, sir, that I am required to administer the bribery oath to you," said the returning officer. "What? What? The bribery oath? To *me*?" inquired Dr. Tatham, giving a sudden start, and flushing violently: at which stringent evidence of his guilt—"Ah, ha!" cried those of the crowd nearest to him—"Come, old gentleman! Thou mun bolt it now!"

"Is it pretended to be believed," faltered Dr. Tatham, with visible emotion—"that *I am bribed*?" But at that moment his eye happened to light upon the exulting countenance of "the Reverend" Mr. Muddfint. It calmed him. Removing his hat, he took the Testament into his hand, while the crowd ceased hooting for a moment, in order to hear the oath read; and with dignity he endured the indignity. He then recorded his vote for Mr. Delamere; and after fixing a sorrowful and surprised eye on Mr. Gammon, who stood with his hat slouched a good deal over his face, and looking in another direction, withdrew; and as he turned his mild and venerable face towards the crowd, the hissing subsided. Shortly afterwards came up, amidst great uproar, several of the tenantry of Mr. Titmouse—all of them looking as if they had come up, poor souls! rather to receive punishment for a crime, than to exercise their elective franchise in a free country. Gammon coloured a little, took out his pocket-book and pencil, and fixing on the first of the tenantry, Mark Hackett, the eye as it were of a suddenly revived serpent, wrote down his name in silence—but what an expression was on his face! Thus he acted towards every one of those unhappy and doomed persons; replacing his pocket-book whence he had taken

it, as soon as the last of the little body had polled. It was now a quarter to three o'clock (the poll closing finally at *four*), and thus stood the numbers :—

Delamere	.	.	.	.	.	149
Titmouse	.	.	.	.	.	146
Majority	.	.	.	.	.	3

On these figures being exhibited by an eager member of Mr. Delamere's committee, there arose a tremendous uproar among the crowd, and cries of "Tear it down! Tear it down! Ah! Bribery and corruption! Three groans for Delamere! O—h! o——h! o——h!" Matters seemed, indeed, getting desperate with the crowd; yet they seemed to feel a sort of comfort in gazing at the stern, determined, yet chagrined countenance of the ruling spirit of the day, Mr. Gammon. He was a "deep hand,"—he knew his game; and, depend upon it, he was only waiting till the enemy was clean done, and then he would pour in the Quaint Club, and crush them for ever. Thus thought hundreds in the crowd. Not a vote was offered for a quarter of an hour; and the poll-clerks, with their pens behind their ears, employed the interval in munching sandwiches, and drinking sherry out of a black bottle—the crowd cutting many jokes upon them while thus pleasantly engaged. Symptoms were soon visible, in the increasing proportion of blue rosettes in and about the crowd, that this promising state of things was reviving the hopes of Mr. Delamere's party, while it as plainly depressed those in the yellow interest. Not for one moment, during the whole of that close and exciting contest, had Mr. Crafty quitted his little inner apartment, where he had planned the battle, and conducted it to its present point of success. Nor had his phlegmatic temperament suffered the least excitement or disturbance: cold as ice though his heart might be, his head was ever clear as crystal. Certainly his strategy had been admirable. Equal to every emergency, he had brought up his forces in perfect order throughout the day; the enemy had not caught the least inkling of his real game. By his manœuvring, he had kept the Quaint Club, in play up to this advanced period of the day—in a state of exquisite embarrassment and irresolution, balancing between hopes and fears; and he had, moreover, rendered a temporary reverse on the field upon which he then fought, of little real importance, by reason of the measures he had taken to cut off the enemy entirely in their very next move. He was now left entirely alone in his little room, standing quietly before the fire with his hands behind him, with real composure, feeling that he had done his duty, and awaiting the issue patiently. The hustings, all this while, exhibited an exciting spectacle. Another quarter of an hour had elapsed without a single vote being added to the poll. The crowd was very great, and evidently experiencing no little of the agitation and suspense experienced by those within the booth—(except Mr. Titmouse, whose frequent potation of brandy and water during the day, had composed him at length to sleep—as he leaned, absolutely snoring, against the corner of the booth, out of sight of the crowd). The poll-clerks were laughing and talking unconcernedly together. The leading Blues mustered strongly on their part of the booth; elated undoubtedly, but with the feelings of men who have desperately fought their way, inch by inch, sword to sword, bayonet to bayonet, up to a point where they expect, nevertheless, momentarily to be blown into the air. What *could* have become of the Quaint Club? thought *they* also, with silent astonishment and apprehension. Gammon continued standing, motionless and silent, with folded arms—his dark surtout buttoned carelessly at the top, and his hat slouched over his eyes, as if he sought to conceal their restlessness and agitation. Excitement—intense

anxiety—physical exhaustion—were visible in his countenance. He seemed indisposed to speak, even in answer to any one who addressed him.

"O cursed Quaint Club! O cursed Crafty! I am beaten—beaten hollow—ridiculously. How the miscreants have bubbled me! Crafty can now do without them, and won't endanger the election by polling them! We are ruined! And what will be said at head-quarters, after what I have led them to believe—bah!" He almost stamped with the vehemence of his emotions. "There's certainly yet a resource; nay, but that also is too late—a riot—a nod, a breath of mine—those fine fellows there—down with hustings—poll-books destroyed. No, no; it is not to be thought of—the time's gone by."

It was now nearly a quarter past three, the poll closing at four. "It's passing strange!" thought Gammon, as he looked at his watch; "what can be in the wind? Not a man of them come up! Perhaps, after all, Lord De la Zouch may not have come up to their mark, and may now be merely standing on the chance of *our* being unable to come to terms with them. But what can I do, without certain destruction, after what I have heard? It will be simply jumping down into the pit." A thought struck him; and with forced calmness he slipped away from the polling-booth, and, with an affectation of indifference, made his way to a house where a trusty emissary awaited his orders. 'Twas a Grilston man, a yellow voter, as much at Gammon's beck and call as Ben Bran was represented to be at the command of Lord De la Zouch. Gammon dispatched him on the following enterprise—viz., to rush alarmedly among the club, who knew *him* but *not* his *devotion to Gammon*—to tell them that he had just discovered, by mere accident, the frightful danger in which they were placed, owing to Mr. Gammon's being enraged against them on account of their last proposal—that he had now made up his mind to the loss of the election, and also to commence prosecutions for bribery against every single member of the club; for that, having early suspected foul play, he was in a position "to nail every man of them," without fixing himself or Mr. Titmouse. If he succeeded thus far—viz., in alarming them—then, after apparently dire perplexity, he was suddenly to suggest one mode of at once securing themselves, and foiling their bitter enemy, Gammon; viz., hastening up to the poll, without a word to any one, and, by placing Titmouse at the top of the poll, *destroy Gammon's motive for commencing his vindictive proceedings*, and so take him in his own trap. Gammon then returned to the polling-booth (having named the signal by which he was to be apprised of success), and resumed his former position, without giving to any one near him the slightest intimation of what he had been doing. If he imagined, however, that any movement of *his*, at so critical a moment, had not been watched, he was grievously mistaken. There were three persons whose sole business it had been, during the whole of that day, to keep a lynx eye upon his every movement, especially as connected with the Quaint Club. But his cunning emissary was equal to the exigency; and having (unseen) reconnoitred the street for a few moments, he imagined that he detected one, if not two spies, lurking about. He therefore slipped out of a low back window, got down four or five back yards, and so across a small hidden alley, which enabled him to slip, unperceivedly, into the back room of the house he wished.

"Ben! Ben!" he gasped, with an air of consternation. "Hallo, man! what is't?" quoth Ben. "Done! every man of you sold! Mr. Gammon turned tail on you!—Just happened to overhear him swear a solemn oath to Mr. Mudflint, that before four-and-twenty hours—" "Lord!—you, did you really?" "So help me——!" exclaimed the man, aghast. "What's to be done?" quoth Ben, the perspiration bursting out all over his forehead. "We've been made the cursedest fools of by some one. Hang me if I think the old beast at Fother-

ingham, or the young cub either, has ever meant—" "What signifies it? It's all too late now." "Isn't there *any* way—eh? To be sure, I own I thought we were pitched a *leettle* too high with Mr. Gam—" "But he has you *now*, though; and you'll find he's a devil incarnate!—But stop, I see"—he seemed as if a thought had suddenly glanced across his puzzled and alarmed mind—"I'll tell you how to do him, and save yourselves yet." "O Lord!—eh?" exclaimed Ben, breathlessly. "But are they all together?" "Oh ay! In five minutes' time we could all be on our way to the booth." "Then don't lose a minute—or all's lost!—Don't explain to them the fix they're in till it's all over—and if *ever* you tell 'em, or any one, the bit o' service I've—" "Never, Thomas, so help me—" quoth Ben, grasping his companion's hand as in a vice. "Off all of you to the booth, and poll for life and death, for *Titmouse*." "What? Come—come, Master Thomas!" "Ay, ay—you fool? Don't you see? Make him win the election, and then *in course* Gammon's no cause to be at you—he'll have got all he wants."

"My eyes!" exclaimed Ben, as he suddenly perceived the stroke of policy. He snapped his finger, buttoned his coat, popped out of the house—within a few moments he was in the midst of the club, who were all in a back yard, behind a small tavern which they frequented. "Now, lads!" he exclaimed, with a wink of his eye. He took the yellow and the blue colours out of his bosom; returned the blue and mounted the yellow: so in a trice did every one present, not one single question having been asked of Ben, in whom they had perfect confidence.

But, to return to Mr. Gammon. It was now a moment or two past the half-hour—there was scarcely half-an-hour more before the election must close. The mob were getting sullen. The Quaint Club were being asked for—now with hisses, then with cheers. All eyes were on Gammon, who felt that they were. His face bore witness to the intensity of his emotions; he did not even attempt to disguise his desperate disappointment. His nerves were strung to their highest pitch of tension; and his eye glanced incessantly, but half-closed, towards a corner house at a little distance; ah! his eye was suddenly lit up, as it were, with fire—never had been such an instantaneous change seen in a man's face before. He had at length caught the appointed signal; a man appeared at a window, and waved a little stick through it. A mighty sigh escaped from the pent-up bosom of Gammon, and relieved him from a sense of suffocation. His feelings might have been compared to those excited in our great commander when the Prussians made their appearance at Waterloo. The battle was won; defeat converted into triumph; but suddenly recollecting himself—aware that every muscle of his face was watched—he relapsed into his former gloom. Presently were heard the approaching sounds of music—nearer and nearer came the clash of cymbals, the clangour of trombone and trumpet, the roll of the drum;—all the crowd turned their faces towards the quarter whence the sounds came, and within a few seconds' time was seen turning the corner, full on its way to the booth, the banner of the Quaint Club, with yellow rosettes streaming from the top of each pole—yellow ribands on every one's breast. *The people's cause had triumphed!* Their oppressors were prostrate! A deafening shout of triumph burst from the crowd and continued for several minutes intermingling with the inspiring sounds of the noble air—"Rule Britannia!" played by the two bands (that of Mr. Titmouse having instantly joined them). On marched the club, two and two, and arm in arm, with rapid step; their faces flushed with excitement—their hands vehemently shaken by the shouting crowd, who opened a broad lane for them up to the polling-booth. Oh, the contrast exhibited in the faces of those standing *there!* What gloom, what vexation, despair on the one hand—what signs of excitement, joy, and triumph on the other! "Titmouse!" cried the

first member of the club, as he gave his vote; "Titmouse!" cried the second; "Titmouse!" cried the third; "Titmouse!" cried the fourth. The battle was won. Mr. Titmouse was in a majority, which went on increasing every minute amidst tremendous cheering. Mr. Gammon's face and figure would at that moment have afforded a study for a picture; the strongly repressed feeling of triumph yet indicating its swelling influence upon his marked and expressive countenance, where an accurate eye might have detected also the presence of anxiety. Again and again were his hands shaken by those near him—Mudflint, Bloodsuck, Woodlouse, Centipede, Going Gone, Gimblossom—as they enthusiastically gave him credit for the transcendent skill he had exhibited, and the glorious result it had secured. As the church clock struck four, the books were closed, and the election was declared at an end, with eighteen of Mr. Titmouse's voters yet unpollled! Within a few minutes afterwards, Mr. Going Gone, hastily chalked upon the board, and held it up exultingly to the crowd:

Titmouse	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	237
Delamere	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	149
Majority	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	88!

"Hurrah!—hurrah!—hip, hip, hip, hurrah!" pealed from the crowd, while hands were upraised and whirled round, hats flung into the air, and every other mark of popular excitement exhibited. "Titmouse!—Titmouse!—*Nine times nine for Mr. Titmouse!*" was called for and responded to with thrilling and overpowering effect. The newly-elected member, however, could not be pinched, or shaken, or roused, out of the drunken stupor into which, from the combined influence of liquor and excitement, he had sunk. To enable him to go through the responsible duties of the day—viz., bobbing his head every now and then to the worthy and independent electors who came to invest him with the proud character of their representative in the House of Commons—he had brought in his pocket a flask of brandy, which had been thrice replenished: in a word, the popular idol was decidedly not presentable; and under the impulse of strong excitement, Mr. Gammon, infinitely to the disgust of the Reverend Smirk Mudflint, who was charged up to his throat with combustible matter, and ready to go off at an instant's notice, stepped forward, and on removing his hat was received with several distinct and long-continued rounds of applause. Silence having at length been partially restored—

"Yes, gentlemen," he commenced in an energetic tone and with an excited and determined air and manner, "well may you utter those shouts of joy, for you have fought a noble fight and won a glorious victory (*great cheering*). Your cause, the cause of freedom and good government, is triumphant over all opposition (*immense cheering*). The hideous forms of bigotry and tyranny are at this moment lying crushed and writhing (vehement cheering rendered the rest of the sentence inaudible). Gentlemen, truth and independence have this day met and overthrown falsehood and slavery (*cheers*), in spite of the monstrous weapons with which they came into the field (*groans*),—bribery (*groans*), corruption (*groans*), intimidation (*hisses*), coercion, and treachery (*mingled groans and hisses*). But gentlemen, thank God, all was in vain! (*enthusiastic cheering*.) I will not say that a defeated despot is at this moment sitting with sullen scowl in a neighbouring castle (*tremendous shouts of applause*); all his schemes frustrated, all his gold scattered in vain, and trampled under foot by the virtuous electors whom he sought first to corrupt, and then degrade into slaves (*great cheering*). Gentlemen, let us laugh at his defeat (*loud and prolonged laughter*); but let us rejoice like men, like freemen, that the degraded and execrable *faction* to which he belongs is defeated

(*cheering*). Gentlemen, if ever there was a contest in which public spirit and principle triumphed over public and private profligacy, this has been it; and by this time to-morrow, hundreds of constituencies will be told, as their own struggles are approaching, to—*look at Yatton*—to emulate her proud and noble example; and England will soon be enabled to throw off the hateful incubus that has so long oppressed her (*immense cheering*). But, gentlemen, you are all exhausted (*No! no! and vehement cheers*); we are all exhausted, after the great labour and excitement of this glorious day, and need repose, in order that on the morrow we may meet refreshed to enjoy the full measure of our triumph (*cheering*). In particular, your distinguished representative Mr. Titmouse, worn out with the excitement of the day, long depressed by the adverse aspect of the poll, was so overpowered with the sudden and glorious change effected by that band of patriots who—(the rest of the sentence was drowned in cheering). Gentlemen, he is young, and unaccustomed to such extraordinary and exciting scenes (*hear, hear, hear!*), but by the morrow he will have recovered sufficiently to present himself before you (*cheers*). In his name, gentlemen, I do from my soul thank you for the honour which you have conferred upon him, and assure you that he considers any past success with which Providence may have blessed him (*hear, hear, hear!*) as nothing, when compared with the issue of this day's struggle (*cheering*). Rely upon it that his conduct in Parliament will not disgrace you (*no, no, no!*) And now, gentlemen, I must conclude, trusting that with victory will cease animosity, and that there will be an immediate declaration of those feelings of frank and manly cordiality, and good feeling, which ought to distinguish free fellow-citizens, and, above all, is signally characteristic of Englishmen (*cheering*). Shake hands, gentlemen, with a fallen enemy (*we will, we will!*), and forget, when you have conquered, that you ever fought!"

With these words, uttered with the fervour and eloquence which had indeed distinguished the whole of his brief address, he resumed his hat, amidst tremendous shouts of "Three times three for Mr. Titmouse!"—"three times three for Mr. Gammon!"—"nine times nine groans for Mr. Delamere!"—all of which were given with tumultuous energy. The two bands approached; the procession formed; the nearly insensible Titmouse, his face deadly pale, and his hat awry, was partly supported and partly dragged along between Mr. Gammon and Mr. Going Gone; and to the inspiring air of "See the Conquering Hero comes," and accompanied by the cheering crowd, they all marched in procession to Mr. Titmouse's committee-room. He was hurried up-stairs; then led into a bed-room; and there, soon, alas! experienced the overmastering power of sickness; which instantly obliterated all recollection of his triumph, and made him utterly unconscious of the brilliant position to which he had just been elevated—equally to the honour of himself and his constituency, who justly and proudly regarded "*Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq., M.P.*"—as the glorious first-fruits to them of the glorious "*Bill for giving Everybody Everything.*"

At a late hour that night, an interview took place between Ben Bran and Mr. Gammon, of which all that I shall say at present is, that it was equally confidential and satisfactory. There can be no harm, however, in intimating that Mr. Gammon made no allusion to the arrival of the Greek kalends; but he *did* to—the fifteenth day after the meeting of Parliament. He satisfied Ben—and through him the Quaint Club—that Lord De la Zouch's agents had been only deluding them, and had laid a deep plan for ensnaring the club—which Gammon had early seen through, and endeavoured to defeat. A little circumstance which happened some two or three days afterwards, seemed to corroborate the truth of at least a portion of his statements—viz., eight prosecutions for bribery were brought against so many members of the Quaint Club: and on their hastily assembling to consult upon so startling an incident,

one still more so came to light;—five leading members were *not to be found*. Writs in actions for penalties of £500 each, were on the same day served upon —Barnabas Bloodsuck, Smirk Mudflint (otherwise called the *Reverend* Smirk Mudflint), Cephas Woodlouse, and—woe is me that I should have it to record! —“Oily Gammon, gentleman, one of the attorneys of our lord the king, before the king himself, at Westminster.” The amount claimed from him was £4,000, from Bloodsuck £3,000; and from Mudflint £2,500, which would, alas, have alone absorbed all the pew-rents of his little establishment for one hundred years to come, if his system of moral teaching should so long live. What was the consternation of these gentlemen to discover, when in their turn they called a private meeting of their leading friends, that one of them was also missing, viz., *Judas M'Do'em!* Moreover, it was palpable that amidst an ominous silence and calmness on the other side— even on the part of the *True Blue*—the most guarded and systematic and persevering search for evidence was going on; and with all Gammon's self-possession, the sudden sight of Mr. Crafty stealthily quitting the house of a humble Yellow voter, a week after the election, occasioned him somewhat sickening sensations. Gammon was not unaccustomed to wade in deep waters; but these were *very* deep! However, a great point had been gained, Mr. Titmouse was M.P. for Yatton; and Mr. Gammon had maintained his credit in high quarters, where he had stood pledged as to the result of the election; having been long before assured that every member returned into the new Parliament was worth his weight in gold.

Such were the thoughts passing through the acute and powerful mind of Gammon, as he sat late one night alone at Yatton, Mr. Titmouse having retired to his bed-room half stupefied with liquor, and anxious to complete matters by smoking himself to sleep. The wind whistled cheerlessly round the angle of the Hall in which was situated the room where he sat, his feet resting on the fender, his arms folded, and his eyes fixed on the fire. Then he took up the newspaper recently arrived from town, which contained a report of his speech to the electors at the close of the poll; it was the organ of the Whig party—the *Morning Groul*; and its leading article commented in very encomiastic terms upon his address, “given in another part of the paper.” His soul heaved with disgust at the thoughts of his own dissimulation;—“Independence!” “Purity of Election!” “Public Principle!” “*Triumph of Principle*,” “Popular enthusiasm!” “Man of the people!”—*Look*, thought he—eugh—at *Titmouse!* Is *representation* an utter farce—a mere *imaginary* privilege of the people? If not, what but public swindlers are we who procure the return of such idiots as—faugh! Would I had been on the other— He rose, sighed, lit his chamber candle, and retired to bed, but not to rest; for he spent several hours in endeavouring to retrace every step which he had taken in the election—with a view to ascertain how far it could be proved that he had legally implicated himself. The position in which, indeed, he and those associated with him in the election were placed, was one which required his most anxious consideration, with a view, not merely to the retention of the seat so hardly won, but to the tremendous personal liabilities with which it was sought to fix him. The inquiries which he instituted into the practices which he had been led to believe prevailed openly upon the other side, led to no satisfactory results. If the enemy had bribed, they had done so with consummate skill and caution. Yet he chose to assume the *air* of one who thought otherwise; and gave directions for writs for penalties to be forthwith served upon Mr. Parkinson, Mr. Gold, Mr. St. Aubyn, and Mr. Milnthorpe—all of whom, as indeed he had expected, only laughed at him. But it was woefully different as regarded himself and his friends: for, before Mr. Crafty took his departure from Yatton, he had collected a body of evidence against all of them, of the most fearful stringency and com-

pleteness. In fact, Lord De la Zouch had determined that, if it cost him ten thousand pounds more, he would spare no effort, as well to secure the seat for his son, as to punish those who had been guilty of the atrocious practices which had been revealed to him.

Need I say with what interest, with what anxiety, the progress of this contest had been watched by the Aubreys? From Lady De la Zouch and other friends, but more especially from Dr. Tatham, who had regularly forwarded the *True Blue*, and also written frequent and full letters, they had learned all that was going on. Mr. Aubrey had prepared them for the adverse issue of the affair; he had never looked for anything else; but could he or any of them feel otherwise than a painful and indignant sympathy with the little Doctor, on reading his account of the gross insult which had been offered to him at the hustings? Kate, before she had read half of it, sprang from her chair, threw down the letter, cried bitterly, then kissed the venerable Doctor's handwriting, and walked to and fro, flashing lightning from her eyes, as her vivid fancy painted to her that scene of outrage on one of the most gentle, benevolent, and spotless of God's creatures, whose name was associated in all their minds with everything that was pious, pure, and good—indeed they were all powerfully affected. As for the *Reverend Smirk Mudflint*—"Presumptuous wretch!" quoth Kate, as her flashing eye met that of her brother: and he felt that his feelings, like her own, could not be expressed. The first account she received of the outrage perpetrated on Delamere was in the columns of the *True Blue*, which, being published that evening, had been instantly forwarded to town by Dr. Tatham. It blanched her cheek; she then felt a mist coming over her eyes—a numbness—a faintness ensued, and she sank upon the sofa, and swooned. It was a long while after she had recovered before a flood of tears relieved her excitement. 'Twas no use disguising matters, even had she felt so disposed, before those who felt so exquisite and vivid a sympathy with her; and who did not restrain their enthusiastic expressions of admiration at the noble manner in which Delamere had commenced and carried on his adventure. At whose instance, and to please whom, had it been really undertaken? Kate's heart fluttered intensely at the bare notion of seeing him again in Vivian Street. He would come—she felt—with a sort of *claim* upon her!—And he made his at once desired and dreaded appearance some days afterwards, quite unexpectedly. Kate was playing on the piano, and had not heard his knock; so that he was actually in the drawing-room before she was aware of his being in London, or had formed the slightest expectation of such a thing.

"Heavens, Mr. Delamere!—Is it you!" she stammered, rising from the piano, her face having suddenly become pale. "Ay, sweet Kate—unless I am become some one else, as—the *rejected of Yatton*"—he replied fondly, as he grasped her hands fervently in his own, and led her to the sofa. "Don't—don't—Mr. Delamere"—said she faintly, striving to release one of her hands, which she instantly placed before her eyes to conceal her rising and violent emotion. Her brother and Mrs. Aubrey considerably came to her relief, by engaging Delamere in conversation. He saw their object; and releasing Miss Aubrey, for the present, from his attentions, entered into a long and very animated account of all his Yatton doings. In spite of herself, as it were, Kate drew near the table, and, engrossed with interest, listened, and joined in the conversation, as if it had not been actually Delamere who was sitting beside her.—He made very light of the little accident of the wounded lip—but as he went on, Kate looked another way, her eyes obstructed with tears, and her very heart yearning towards him. "Oh, Mr. Delamere!"—she suddenly and vehemently exclaimed—"what *wretches* they were to use you so!" and then blushed scarlet. Shortly afterwards Mr. Aubrey went downstairs to fetch up one of Dr. Tatham's letters for a particular purpose; and—what will my lady readers say? during

his brief absence—but, on further consideration, I shall say nothing of what happened !

“Well—see if I’m not M.P. for Yatton, yet”—said Delamere, with a confident air, just before he rose to go—“and that within a few weeks, too; and *then*—” “Don’t be too sure of *that*,” said Aubrey gravely. “Sure? I’ve no more doubt of it,” replied Delamere briskly, “than I have of our now being in Vivian Street—if there be the slightest pretence to fairness in a committee of the House of Commons. Why, upon my honour, we’ve got no fewer than eleven distinct, unequivocal, well-supported—” “If election committees are to be framed of such people as appear to have been returned—” * * *

Did, however, the gaudy flower of Titmouse’s victory at Yatton contain the seeds of inevitable defeat at St. Stephen’s. ’Twas surely a grave question; and had to be decided by a tribunal, the constitution of which, however, the legislature hath since, in its wisdom, seen fit altogether to alter. With matters, therefore, as they then were—but now are not—I deal freely, as with history.

The first glance which John Bull caught of his new House of Commons, under the *Bill for giving Everybody Everything*, almost turned his stomach, strong as it was, inside out; and he stood for some time staring with feelings of alternate disgust and dismay. Really, as far at least as outward appearance and behaviour went, there seemed scarcely fifty gentlemen among them; and those appeared ashamed and afraid of their position. ’Twas, indeed, as though the scum that had risen to the simmering surface of the caldron placed over the fierce fires of revolutionary ardour, had been ladled off and flung upon the floor of the House of Commons. The shock and mortification produced such an effect upon John, that he took for some time to his bed, and required a good deal of severe treatment, before he in any degree recovered himself. It was, indeed, a long while before he got quite right in his head!—As they anticipated a good deal of embarrassment from the presidency of the experienced and dignified person who had for many years filled the office of Speaker, they chose a new one; and then, breathing freely, started fair for the session.

Some fifty seats were contested; and one of the very earliest duties of the new Speaker, was to announce the receipt of “a petition from certain electors of the borough of Yatton, complaining of an undue return; and praying the House to appoint a time for taking the same into its consideration.” Mr. Titmouse, at that moment, was modestly sitting immediately behind the Treasury bench, next to a respectable pork-butcher, who had been returned for an Irish county, and with whom Mr. Titmouse had been dining at a neighbouring tavern; where he had drunk whisky and water enough to elevate him to the point of rising to present several petitions from his constituents—*first*, from Smirk Muddint, and others, for opening the universities of Oxford and Cambridge to Dissenters of every denomination, and abolishing the subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles; *secondly*, from Mr. Hic Hæc Hoc, praying for a commission to inquire into the propriety of translating the Eton Latin and Greek grammars into English; *thirdly*, from several electors, praying the House to pass an act for exempting members of that House from the operation of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency laws, as well as from arrest on mesne and final process; and *lastly*, from several electors, praying the House to issue a commission to inquire into the cause of the *Tick* in sheep. I say this was the auspicious commencement of his senatorial career, meditated by Mr. Titmouse, when his ear caught the above startling words uttered by the Speaker, which so disconcerted him—prepared though he was for some such move on the part of his enemies, that he resolved to postpone the presentation of the petitions of his enlightened constituents till the ensuing day. After sitting in a dreadful stew for some twenty minutes or so, he felt it necessary to go out and calm his flurried spirits with a

glass of brandy and soda-water. As he went out, a little incident happened to him that was attended with very memorable consequences.

"A word with you, sir," whispered a commanding voice in his ear, as he felt himself caught hold of by some one sitting at the corner of the Treasury Bench—"I'll follow you out—*quietly*, mind."

The speaker was a Mr. Swindle O'Gibbet, a tall, elderly, and somewhat corpulent person, with a broad-brimmed hat, a slovenly surtout, and vulgar swaggering carriage; a ruddy shining face, that constantly wore a sort of greasy smile; and an unctuous eye, with a combined expression of cunning, cowardice, and ferocity. He spoke in a rich brogue, and with a sort of confidential and cringing familiarity; yet, withal, 'twas with the air and the tone of a man conscious of possessing great direct influence out of doors, and indirect influence within doors. 'Twas, in a word, at once insinuating and peremptory—submissive and truculent. Several things had concurred to give Titmouse a very exalted notion of Mr. O'Gibbet. First, a noble speech of his, in which he showed infinite "*pluck*" in persevering against shouts of "order" from all parts of the House for an hour together; secondly, his sitting on the front bench, often close beside little Lord Bulfinch, the leader of the House. His lordship was a Whig; and though, as surely I need hardly say, there are thousands of Whigs every whit as pure and high-minded as their Tory rivals, his lordship was a very *bitter* Whig. The bloom of original Whiggism, however, ripening fast into the rottenness of Radicalism, gave out at length an odour which was so offensive to many of his own early friends, that they were forced to withdraw from him. Personally, however, he was of respectable character, and a man of considerable literary pretensions, and enjoyed that Parliamentary influence generally secured to the possessor of talent, tact, experience, and temper. Now, it certainly argued some resolution in Mr. O'Gibbet to preserve an air of swaggering assurance and familiarity beside his aristocratic little neighbour, whose freezing demeanour towards him—for his lordship evinced even a sort of shudder of disgust when addressed by him—Mr. O'Gibbet felt to be visible to all around. Misery makes strange bedfellows, but surely politics stranger still; and there could not have been a more striking instance of it than in Lord Bulfinch and Mr. O'Gibbet sitting side by side—as great a contrast in their person as in their characters. But the third and chief ground of Titmouse's admiration of Mr. O'Gibbet, was a conversation—private the parties thought it, and unheard, in the lobby of the House; but every word of it had our inquisitive, but not very scrupulous, little friend contrived to overhear—between Mr. O'Gibbet and Mr. Flummery, a smiling supple Lord of the Treasury, and whipper-in of the Ministry. Though generally confident enough, on this occasion he trembled, frowned, and looked infinitely distressed. Mr. O'Gibbet chuckled him under the chin, confidently and good-humouredly, and, said—"Oh, murther and Irish! what's easier?—But it lies in a nutshell. If you won't do it, I can't swim; and if I can't *you sink*—every mother's son of you. Oh, come, come—give me a bit of a push at this pinch." "That's what you've said so often——" "Fait, an' what if I have! And look at the *shoves* I've given *you*," said Mr. O'Gibbet with sufficient sternness. "But a—a—really we shall be found out! The House suspects already that you and we——" "Bah! bother! hubbabo! Propose you it; I get up and oppose it—*vehemently*, do you mind—an' the blackguards opposite will carry it for you, out of love for me, ah, ah!—Aisy, aisy—softly say I! Isn't that the way to get along?" and Mr. O'Gibbet winked his eye. Mr. Flummery, however, looked unhappy, and remained silent and irresolute. "Oh, my dear sir—*exporriges frontem*! Get along wid you, you know it's for your own good," said Mr. O'Gibbet; and, shoving him on good-humouredly, left the lobby, while Mr. Flummery passed on, with a forced smile, to his seat. He remained comparatively silent, and very wretched, the whole night.

Two hours before the House broke up, but not till after Lord Bulfinch had withdrawn, Mr. Flummery seizing his opportunity, got up to do the bidding, and eventually fulfilled the prophecy of Mr. O'Gibbet, amidst bitter and incessant jeers and laughter from the opposition.

"Another such victory and we're undone," said he, with a furious whisper, soon afterwards to Mr. O'Gibbet. "Och, go to the ould divil wid ye!" replied Mr. O'Gibbet, thrusting his tongue into his cheek, and moving off.

Now Titmouse had contrived to overhear almost every word of the above, and had naturally formed a prodigious estimate of Mr. O'Gibbet and his influence in the highest quarters. But to proceed.—Within a few minutes' time might have been seen Titmouse and O'Gibbet earnestly conversing together, remote from observation, in one of the passages leading from the lobby. Mr. O'Gibbet spoke all the while in a tone which at once solicited and commanded attention. "Sir, of course you know you've not a ghost of a chance of keeping your seat? I've heard all about it. You'll be beat, dead beat; will never be able to sit in this *parlimint*, sir, for your own borough, and be liable to no end o' penalties for bribery, besides. Oh, *my dear sir*, how I wish I had been at your elbow! This would never have happened!" "Oh, sir! 'pon my soul—I—I"—stammered Titmouse, quite thunderstruck at Mr. O'Gibbet's words. "Hush—st—*hush*, wid your chattering tongue, sir, or we'll be overheard, and you'll be ruined," interrupted Mr. O'Gibbet, looking suspiciously around. "I—I—beg your pardon, sir, but I'll give up my seat. I'm most uncommon sorry that ever—curse me if I care about being a mem—" "Oh! and is *that* the way you spake of being a mumber o' parlimint? For shame, for shame, not to feel the glory of your position, sir! There's *millions* o' gentlemen envying you, just now!—Sir, I see that you're likely to cut a figure in the House." "But, begging pardon, sir, if it *costs* such a precious long figure—why, I've come down some four or five thousand pounds already," quoth Titmouse, twisting his hand into his hair. "An, what if ye have? What's that to a gentleman o' your consequence in the country? It's, moreover, only once and for all; only stick in *now*—and you stay in for seven years, and come in for nothing next time; and now—d'ye hear me, sir? for time presses—retire, and give the seat to a Tory, if you will—(what's the name o' the blackguard? Oh, it's young Delamere)—and have your own borough stink under your nose all your days! But can you keep a secret like a gentleman? Judging from your appearance, I should say yes—sir—is it so?" Titmouse placed his hand over his heart, and with a great oath solemnly declared that he would be "mum as death;" on which Mr. O'Gibbet lowered his tone to a faint whisper—"You'll distinctly understand I've nothing to do with it personally, but it's impossible, sir—d'ye hear?—to fight the divil except with his own weapons—and there are too many o' the enemies o' the people in the house—a little *money*, sir—eh! Aisy, aisy—softly say I! Isn't that the way to get along?" added Mr. O'Gibbet with a rich leer, and poking Titmouse in the ribs. "'Pon my life that'll do—and—and—what's the figure, sir?" "Sir, as you're a young mumber, and of Liberal principles," continued Mr. O'Gibbet, dropping his tone still lower, *three thousand pounds*—"Titmouse started as if he had been shot. "Mind, that *clears* you, sir, d'ye understand? Everything! Out and out, no reservation at all at all—divil a bit!" "Pon my life I shall be ruined between you all!" gasped Titmouse faintly. "Sir, you're not the man I took you for," replied O'Gibbet, impatiently, and contemptuously. "Don't you see a barleycorn before your nose? You'll be *beat* after spending three times the money I name, and be liable to ten thousand penalties besides for bribery—" "Oh, 'pon my life, sir, as for *that*," said Titmouse briskly, but feeling sick at heart, "I've no more to do with it than—my tiger—" "Bah! you're a babby, I see!" quoth O'Gibbet testily. "What's the name o' your man o' business?—

there's not a minute to lose—it's your greatest friend I mane to be, I assure ye—tut, what's his name?" "Mr. Gammon," replied Titmouse anxiously. "Let him, sir, be with me at my house in Ruffian Row by nine to-morrow morning to a minute—and alone," said Mr. O'Gibbet, with his lip close to Titmouse's ear—"and once more, d'ye hear, sir—a breath about this to any one, an' you're a ruined man—you're in my power most completely!"—with this Mr. O'Gibbet and Mr. Titmouse parted—the former having much other similar business on hand, and the latter determined to hurry off to Mr. Gammon forthwith: and in fact he was within the next five minutes in his cab, on his way to Thavies' Inn.

Mr. Gammon was at Mr. O'Gibbet's (of whom he spoke to Titmouse in the most unqualified terms of admiration) at the appointed hour: and after an hour's private conference with him, they both went off to Mr. Flummery's official residence, in Pillory Place; but what passed there I never have been able to ascertain with sufficient accuracy to warrant me in laying it before the reader.

When the day for taking into consideration the Yatton Petition had arrived—on a voice calling out at the door of the House, "Counsel in the Yatton petition!"—in walked forthwith eight learned gentlemen, four being of counsel for the petitioner, and four for the sitting member—attended by their respective agents, who stood behind, whilst the counsel took their seats at the bar of a very crowded and excited House; for there were several committees to be balloted for on that day. The door of the House was then locked; and the order of the day was read. Titmouse might have been seen popping up and down about the back ministerial benches, like a parched pea. On the front Treasury bench sat Mr. O'Gibbet, his slouched hat over his fat face, his arms folded. On the table stood several glasses, containing little rolls of paper, each about two or three inches long, and with the name of every member of the House severally inscribed on them. These glasses being placed before the Speaker, the clerk rose, and taking them out presented them to the Speaker, who, opening each, read out aloud the name inscribed, to the House. Now, the object was, on such occasions, to draw out the names of *thirty-three* members then present in the House; which were afterwards to be reduced, by each party alternately striking off eleven names, to eleven—who were the committee charged with the trial of the petition. Now the astute reader will see that, imagining the House to be divided into two great classes, viz., those *favourable* and those *opposed* to the petitioner—according to whose success or failure a vote was retained, lost, or gained to the *party*—and as the number of thirty-three cannot be more nearly divided than into seventeen and sixteen, 'tis said by those experienced in such matters, that in cases where it ran so close—that party invariably and necessarily won who drew the *seventeenth* name; seeing that each party having eleven names of those in his opponent's interest, to expunge out of the thirty-three, he who luckily drew this prize of the seventeenth man, was sure to have six good men and true on the committee against the other's five. And thus of course it was, in the case of a greater or less proportion of favourable or adverse persons answering to their names. So keenly was all this felt and appreciated by the whole House, on these interesting—these *solemn*, these *deliberative*, and *judicial* occasions—that on every name being called, there were sounds heard and symptoms witnessed indicative of delight or vexation. Now, on the present occasion, it would at first have appeared as if some unfair advantage had been secured by the opposition; since five of *their* names were called, to two of those of their opponents; but then only one of the five *answered* (it so happening that the other four were absent, disqualified as being petitioned against, or exempt), while both of the *two* answered!—You should have seen the chagrined faces and heard the loud exclamations of "Ts!—ts!—ts!" on either side of the

House, when their own men's names were thus abortively called over!—the delight visible on the other side!—The issue long hung in suspense; and at length the scales were evenly poised, and the House was in a state of exquisite anxiety; for the next eligible name answered to, would determine which side was to gain or lose a seat.

"*Sir Ezekiel Tuddington*!"—cried the Speaker, amidst profound and agitated silence. He was one of the opposition—but answered not; he was absent. "Ts! ts! ts!" cried the opposition. "*Gabriel Grubb*!"—This was a ministerial man, who rose, and said he was serving on another committee. "Ts! ts! ts!" cried the ministerial side. "*Bennet Barleycorn*!"—(opposition)—petitioned against. "Ts! ts! ts!" vehemently cried the opposition. "*Phelim O'Doodle*!"—"Here!" exclaimed that honourable member, spreading triumph over the ministerial, and dismay over the opposition side of the House; and the thirty-three names having been thus called and answered to, a loud buzz arose on all sides—of congratulation or despondency.

The fate of the petition, it was said, was already as good as decided.—The parties having retired to "strike" the committee, returned in about an hour's time, and the following members were then sworn in, and ordered to meet the next morning at eleven o'clock:—

Ministerial.

- (1.) Sir Simper Silly.
- (2.) Noah No-land.
- (3.) Phelim O'Doodle.
- (4.) Micah M'Squash.
- (5.) Sir Caleb Calf.
- (6.) Och Hubbaboo.

Opposition.

- (1.) Castleton Plume.
- (2.) Charles D'Eresby.
- (3.) Mertin Mortimer.
- (4.) Sir Simon Alkmond.
- (5.) Lord Frederick Brackenbury.

And the six, of course, on their meeting, chose the *chairman*, who was a sure card—to wit, SIR CALEB CALF, Bart.

Mr. Delamere's counsel and agents, together with Mr. Delamere himself, met at consultation that evening, all with the depressed air of men who are going on in any undertaking *contra speciem*. "Well, what think you of our committee?" inquired Mr. Berrington, the eloquent, acute, and experienced leading counsel. All present shrugged their shoulders, but at length agreed that even with such a committee, their case was an overpowering one; no committee could dare to shut their eyes to such an array of facts as were here collected; the clearest case of *agency* made out—Mr. Berrington declared—that he had ever known in all his practice; and eleven distinct cases of *bribery*, supported each by at least three unexceptional witnesses; together with half-a-dozen cases of *treating*; in fact, their case, it was admitted, had been most admirably got up, under the management of Mr. Crafty (who was present), and they *must* succeed.

"Of course, they'll call for proof of *agency* first," quoth Mr. Berrington, carelessly glancing over his enormous brief; "and we'll at once fix this—what's his name—the Unitarian parson, Muff—Muffin." "Muddint—Smirk Muddint—" "Ah, ha!—Well!—we'll begin with him, and—Bloodsuck, and Centipede. Fix *them*—the rest all follow, and they'll strike, in spite of their committee—or—egad—we'll have a shot at the sitting member himself."

By eleven o'clock the next morning the committee and the parties were in attendance—the room quite crowded—such a quantity of Yatton faces?—There, near the chairman, with his hat perched as usual on his bushy hair, and dressed in his ordinary extravagant and absurd style—his glass screwed into his eye, and his hands stuck into his hinder coat-pockets, and resting on his hips, stood the sitting member, Mr. Titmouse; and after the usual preliminaries had been gone through, up rose Mr. Berrington, with the calm, confident air of a man going to open a winning case; and an overwhelming case he *did* open—the chairman glancing gloomily at the five ministerials on his right, and then inquisitively at the five opposition members on his left. The statement of counsel was luminous and powerful. As he went on, he disclosed almost as minute and accurate a knowledge of the movements of the Yellows at Yatton, as Mr. Gammon himself could have supplied him with. That gentleman shared in the dismay felt around him. 'Twas clear that there had been infernal treachery; that they were all ruined. "By Jove! there's no standing up against *this*, unless we break them down at the agency—for Berrington don't overstate his cases," whispered Mr. Granville, the leading counsel for the sitting member, to one of his juniors, and to Gammon, who sighed, and said nothing. With all his experience in the general business of his profession, he knew as yet little or nothing of what might be expected from a *favourable election committee*. Stronger and stronger, blacker and blacker, closer and closer, came out the petitioner's case. The five opposition members paid profound attention to Mr. Berrington, and took notes; while, as for the ministerials, one was engaged with his betting-book, another writing out franks (in which he dealt), a third conning over an attorney's letter, and two were quietly playing together at "*Tit-tat-to*." As was expected, the committee called peremptorily for proof of *agency*; and I will say only, that if *Smirk Mudflint*, *Barnabas Bloodsuck*, and *Seth Centipede*, were not fixed as the "*agents*" of the sitting member—then there is no such relation as that of principal and agent in *rerum naturâ*: there never was in this world an agent that had a principal, or a principal that had an agent.—Take only, for instance, the case of Mudflint. He was proved to have been from first to last an active member of Mr. Titmouse's committee; attending on hundreds of occasions in the presence of Mr. Titmouse—canvassing with him—consulting him—making appointments with him for calling on voters, which appointments he invariably kept; letters in his hand-writing relating to the election, signed some by Mr. Titmouse, some by Mr. Gammon; circulars similarly signed, and distributed by Mudflint, and the addresses in his hand-writing; several election bills paid by him on account of Mr. Titmouse; directions given by him and observed, as to the bringing up voters to the poll; publicans' bills paid at the committee-room, in the presence of Mr. Titmouse—and, in short, many other such acts as these were established against all three of the above persons. Such a dreadful effect did all this have upon Mr. Bloodsuck and Mr. Centipede, that they were obliged to go out, in order to get a little gin and water; for they were indeed in a sort of death-sweat. As for Mudflint, he seemed to get sallower and sallower every minute; and felt almost disposed to utter an inward prayer, had he thought it would have been of the slightest use.

Mr. Berrington's witnesses were fiercely cross examined, but no material impression was produced upon them; and when Mr. Granville, on behalf of the sitting member, confident and voluble, rose to prove to the committee that his learned friend's case was one of the most trumpery that had ever come before a committee—a mere bottle of smoke;—that the three gentlemen had been no more the agents of the sitting member than was he—the counsel then on his legs—the agent of the Speaker of the House of Commons, and that every one of the petitioner's witnesses was unworthy of belief—in fact *perjured*—how sud-

denly awake to the importance of the investigation became the ministerialist members! They never took their eyes off Mr. Granville, except to take notes of his pointed, cogent, unanswerable observations! *He called no witnesses.* At length he sat down; and strangers were ordered to withdraw—and 'twas well they did: for such an amazing uproar ensued among the committee, as soon as the five opposition members discovered, to their astonishment and disgust, that there was the least doubt amongst their opponents as to the establishment of agency, as would not, possibly, have tended to raise that committee, as a judicial body, in public estimation. After an hour and a half's absence, strangers were re-admitted. Great was the rush—for the fate of the petition hung on the decision to be immediately pronounced. As soon as the counsel had taken their seats, and the eager, excited crowd been subdued into something like silence, the chairman, Sir Caleb Calf, with a flushed face, and a very uneasy expression, read from a sheet of foolscap paper, which he held in his hand, as follows:—

“Resolved—That the Petitioner's Counsel be directed to *proceed* with evidence of *agency*” [*i.e.*, the committee were of opinion that no sufficient evidence had yet been given, to establish Messrs. Mudflint, Bloodsuck, and Centipede, as the agents of Mr. Titmouse, in the election for Yatton!!!]. The five opposition members sat with stern indignant faces, all with their backs turned towards the chairman; and nothing but a very high tone of feeling, and chivalrous sense of their position, as members of a public committee of the House of Commons, prevented their repeating in public their fierce protest against the monstrous decision at which the committee, through the casting voice of the redoubtable chairman, had arrived.

Their decision was not immediately understood or appreciated by the majority of those present. After a pause of some moments, and amidst profound silence—

“Have I rightly understood the resolution of the committee, sir,” inquired Mr. Berrington, with an amazed air, “that the evidence already adduced is *not sufficient* to satisfy the committee, as to the *agency* of Messrs. Mudflint, Bloodsuck, and Centipede?” “The committee *meant*, sir, to express as much,” replied the chairman drily, and he sealed a letter with affected indifference: *affected*, indeed! the letter being one addressed to a friend, to desire him forthwith to take a hostile message on his—the chairman's—behalf to Colonel D'Eresby, one of the committee, who, had, during the discussion with closed doors, spoken his mind pretty freely concerning the conduct of the aforesaid chairman.

“Good God!” exclaimed Mr. Berrington (on receiving the chairman's answer), in a tone of voice loud enough to be heard all over the room, “*neither would they believe though one rose from the dead.*” “We'd better strike,” said his juniors. “I think so, too,” said Mr. Berrington; adding, as he turned towards the committee with an air of undisguised disgust, “I protest, sir, that never in the whole course of my experience before election committees, have I been so astounded as I am at the decision to which the committee has just come. Probably, under these circumstances, the committee will be pleased to adjourn till the morning, to give us an opportunity of considering the course we will pursue.” (This produced a great sensation.)

“Certainly, let it be so,” replied the chairman blandly, yet anxiously; and the committee broke up. Before they met again, three shots a-piece had been exchanged between the chairman and Colonel D'Eresby—“happily without effect,” and the parties left the ground in as hostile a spirit as they had reached it. I will say for the Colonel, that he was a plain, straightforward soldier who did not understand nonsense, nor could tolerate coquetting with an oath.

‘Of course the petition is dropped?’ said Mr. Berrington bitterly, as soon as

all were assembled in the evening, in consultation at his chambers. "Of course," was the answer, in a sufficiently melancholy tone. "So help me Heaven!" said Mr. Berrington, "I feel disposed to say I will never appear again before a committee. This sort of thing cannot go on much longer! To think that every man of that committee is sworn before God to do his duty. I'll take care to strike every one of those six men off from any future list that I may have to do with!"

"I can only say," remarked the second counsel, a calm and experienced lawyer, "that, in my opinion, had all of us sat down to frame, beforehand, a perfect case of agency—with facts at will—we could never have framed one stronger than the one to-day declared insufficient."

"I have been in seven other petitions," said Mr. Berrington, "this very week; but there the sitting members were Tories: Gracious Heaven! what facts have been *there* held sufficient proof of agency! The *Barnard Castle* committee yesterday, held that, to have been seen shaking hands in a pastry-cook's shop with the sitting member, was sufficient evidence of *agency*—and we've lost the seat! In the *Cucumber* committee, a man who by chance stood once under a doorway with the sitting member, in a sudden shower of rain—was held thereby to have become his agent; and we *there* also lost the seat!—Faugh! what would foreigners say if they heard such things?"

"It's perhaps hardly worth mentioning," said Mr. Parkinson; "but this afternoon I happened to see Mr. O'Gibbet dining with Mr. O'Doodle, Mr. Hubbaboo, and Mr. M'Squash, off pork and greens, at the Jolly Thieves' Tavern in Dodge Street—I—I—they were talking together very eagerly—" "The less we say about *that* the better," replied Mr. Berrington; "I have not had my eyes shut, I can tell you! It's a hard case, Mr. Crafty; but after all your pains, and the dreadful expense incurred, it's nevertheless quite farcical to think of going on with a committee like this—" "Of course the petition is abandoned," replied Crafty.

The next morning they again appeared before the committee.

"I have to inform the committee," commenced Mr. Berrington, with sufficient sternness, "that my learned friends and I, who had, in our ignorance and inexperience, imagined, till yesterday, that the evidence we then opened was ten times more than sufficient to establish agency before any *legal* tribunal—"

"Counsel will be pleased to moderate their excitement, and to treat the committee with due respect," interrupted the chairman warmly, and reddening as he spoke; while the ministerial members looked very fiercely at Mr. Berrington, and one or two placed their arms a-kimbo.

"—have come to the determination to withdraw the petitioner's case from before the committee; as, under existing circumstances, it would be utterly absurd to attempt—" "Fait, sir, an' you're mighty indacent—ye are—an' you'd better keep a civil tongue in your head," said Mr. O'Doodle fiercely, and with an insolent look at Mr. Berrington. "Sir," said the latter, addressing Mr. O'Doodle with a bitter smile—"as it is possible to stand where I do without ceasing to be a gentleman, so it is possible to sit *there*—without becoming one." "Sir—Misther Chairman—I'll only just ask you, sir—isn't *that* a brache of privilege—" "Oh, be aisy—aisy wid ye—and isn't he *hired* to say all this?" whispered Mr. Hubbaboo; and the indignant senator sat down. "The petition is withdrawn, sir," said Mr. Berrington calmly.

"Then," subjoined his opponent, as quietly rising as his learned friend had sat down, "I respectfully apply to the committee to vote it *Frivolous and vexatious*."

"Possibly the committee will pause before going *that* length," said Mr. Berrington very gravely; but he was mistaken. Strangers were ordered to withdraw; and, on their re-admission, the chairman read the resolution of the

committee, that "Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq., had been and was duly elected to serve for the borough of Yatton; and that the petition against his return was *Frivolous and Vexatious*:" by which decision, all the costs and expenses incurred by Mr. Titmouse were thrown upon his opponent Mr. Delamere—a just penalty for his wanton and presumptuous attempt. This decision was welcomed by the crowd in the committee-room with clapping of hands, stamping of feet, and cheering. Such was the fate of the *Yatton Petition*. Mr. Titmouse, on entering the House that evening, was received with loud cheers from the ministerial benches: and within a few minutes afterwards, Lord Frederick Brackenbury, to give the House and the public an idea of the important service performed by the committee, rose and moved that the *evidence should be printed* which was ordered.—

The next day a very distinguished patriot gathered some of the blooming fruit of the *Bill for giving Everybody Everything*—(not for himself personally, however, but *as a trustee for the public*); so, at least, I should infer from the following fact, that whereas, in the morning, his balance at his banker's was exactly £3 10s. 7½d.—by the afternoon, it was suddenly augmented to £3,003 10s. 7½d.—shortly expressed thus:—

"£3 : 10 : 7½ + £3,000 = £3,003 : 10 : 7½."

Thus might my friend Titmouse exclaim, "Out of this nettle *danger* I've plucked the flower *safety*!" 'Twas, indeed, fortunate for the country, that such, and so early, had been the termination of the contest for the representation of Yatton; for it enabled Mr. Titmouse at once to enter, with all the energy belonging to his character, upon the discharge of his legislative functions. The very next day after his own seat had been secured to him by the decision of the committee, he was balloted for, and chosen one of the members of a committee of which *Swindle O'Gibbet, Esquire*, was chairman, for trying the validity of the return of two Tory impostors for an Irish county. So marvellously quick an insight into the merits of the case did he and his brethren in the committee obtain, that they intimated, on the conclusion of the petitioner's counsel's opening address, that it would be quite superfluous for him to call witnesses in support of a statement of facts, which it was presumed the sitting members could not think of seriously contesting. Against this, the sitting members' counsel remonstrated with indignant energy, on which the committee thought it best to let him take his own course, which would entail its own consequences; viz., that the opposition to the petition would be voted frivolous and vexatious. A vast deal of evidence was then adduced, after which, as might have been expected, the Committee reported to the House, that Lord Beverly de Wynston (who owned half the county for which he had presumed to stand) and Sir Harry Eddington (who owned pretty nearly the other half), both resident in the county, had been unduly returned; that two most respectable gentlemen, Mr. O'Shirtless and Mr. O'Toddy, (the one a discarded attorney's clerk, and the other an insolvent publican, neither of whom had ever been in the county till the time of the election), ought to have been returned; and the clerk of the House was to amend the return accordingly; and that the opposition to the petition had been frivolous and vexatious: which last was an ingenious and happy device for making the Peer and Baronet pay the expense of Messrs. O'Shirtless and O'Toddy's election! Mr. Titmouse after this formed an intimate acquaintance with the two gentlemen, whom, infinitely to their own astonishment, he had helped to seat for the county, and who had many qualities kindred to his own, principally in the matter of dress and drink. Very shortly afterwards, he was elected one of a committee to inquire into the state of the operation of the Usury Laws, and another, of a still more important character—viz., to inquire into the state of our relations with foreign powers, with reference to free trade and the permanent preservation of peace. They

continued sitting for a month, and thus stated the luminous result of their inquiry and deliberation, in their report to the House :—"That the only effectual mode of securing permanently the goodwill of foreign powers, was by removing all restrictions upon their imports into this country, and imposing prohibitory duties upon our exports into theirs ; at the same time reducing our naval and military establishments to a point which should never thereafter occasion uneasiness to any foreign power. And that any loss of revenue occasioned by the adoption of the former suggestion, would be compensated for by the saving of expenditure effected by carrying into effect the latter." He also served on one or two private committees, attended by counsel. In the course of their inquiries many very difficult and complicated questions arose, which called forth great ability on the part of counsel. On one occasion, in particular, I recollect that Mr. Depth, one of the most dexterous and subtle reasoners to be found at the English bar, having started the great question really at issue between the parties, addressed a long and most masterly argument to the committee. He found himself, after some time, making rapid way with them ; and, in particular, there were indications that he had at length powerfully arrested the attention of Mr. Titmouse, who, his chin resting on his open hand, and his elbow on the table, leaned forward towards Mr. Depth, on whom he fixed his eye apparently with deep attention. How mistaken, however, was Depth ! Titmouse was thinking all the while of two very different matters ; viz., whether he could possibly sit it out without a bottle of soda-water, labouring as he was, under the sickening effects of excessive potations overnight ; and also whether his favourite little terrier, Titty, would win or lose in her encounter on the morrow with fifty rats—that being the number which Mr. Titmouse had bet three to one she would kill in three minutes' time. The decision to which that committee might come, would affect interests to the amount of nearly a million sterling, and might or might not occasion a monstrous invasion of vested rights !

He still continued to occupy his very handsome apartments at the Albany. You might generally have seen him, about ten o'clock in the morning (or say *twelve*, when his attendance was not required upon committees), reclining on his sofa, enveloped in a yellow figured satin dressing-gown, smoking an enormous hookah ; with a little table before him, with a decanter of gin, cold water, and a tumbler or two upon it. On a large round table near him lay a great number of dinner and evening cards, notes, letters, public and private, vote-papers, and Parliamentary reports. Beside him, on the sofa, lay the last number of the *Sunday Flash*—to which, and to the *Newgate Calendar*, his reading was, in fact, almost entirely confined. Over his mantelpiece was a large hideous oil-painting of two brawny and half-naked ruffians, in boxing attitude ; opposite was a very large picture (for which he had given seventy guineas) of Lord Scaramouch's dog Nestor, in his famous encounter with two hundred rats, which he killed in the astonishingly short space of seven minutes and fifteen seconds. Opposite to the door, however, was the great point of attraction ; viz., a full-length portrait of Titmouse himself. His neck was bare, his ample shirt-collars being thrown down over his shoulders, and his face looking upwards. The artist had laboured hard to give it that fine indignant expression with which, in pictures of men of genius, they are generally represented as looking up towards the moon ; but nature was too strong for him—his eye too accurate, and his brush too obedient to his eye ; so that the only expression he could bring out, was one of innocent and stupid wonder. A rich green mantle enveloped Titmouse's figure ; and amidst its picturesque folds, was visible his left hand, holding them together, and with a glittering ring on the first and last fingers. In one corner of the room, on a table, were a pair of foils ; and on the ground near them, three or four pairs of boxing

gloves. On another table lay a guitar—on another a violin ; on both of which delightful instruments he was taking almost daily lessons. Though the room was both elegantly and expensively furnished (according to the taste of its former occupant), it was now redolent—as were Mr. Titmouse's clothes—of the odours of tobacco-smoke and gin and water. Here it was that Mr. Titmouse would often spend hour after hour boxing with Billy Bully, the celebrated prize-fighter and pickpocket ; or, when somewhat far gone in liquor, playing cribbage or put with his valet—an artful, impudent fellow, who had gained great influence over him.

As for the House—Modesty (the twin-sister of Merit) kept Mr. Titmouse for a long time very quiet there. He saw the necessity of attentively watching everything that passed around him, in order to become practically familiar with the routine of business, before he ventured to step forward into action, and distinguish himself. He had not been long, however, thus prudently occupied, when an occasion presented itself, of which he availed himself with all the bold felicitous promptitude of genius—whose prime distinguishing characteristic is the successful seizure of opportunity. He saw that he should be able to bring into play an early accomplishment of his—an accomplishment of which, when acquiring it, how little he dreamed of the signal uses to which it might be afterwards turned ? In early life, while following the humble calling in which he was occupied when first presented to the reader, he used to amuse himself, in his long journeys about the streets, with his bundle and yard-measure under his arm, by imitating the cries of cats, the crowing of cocks, the squeaking of pigs, the braying of donkeys, and the yelping of curs ; in which matters he became at length so great a proficient, as to attract the admiring attention of passers-by, and to afford great amusement to the circles in which he visited. There is probably no man living, though ever so great a fool, that cannot do *something* or other well ; and Titmouse became a surprising proficient in the arts I have alluded to. He could imitate a *blue-bottle fly* buzzing about the window, and, lighting upon it, abruptly cease its little noise, and anon flying off again, as suddenly resume it ;—a *chicken*, peering and picking its way cautiously among the growing cabbages ;—a *cat*, at midnight on the moonlit tiles, pouring forth the sorrows of her heart on account of the absence of her inconstant mate ;—a *cock*, suddenly waking out of some horrid dream—it might be the nightmare—and, in the ecstasy of its fright, crowing as though it would split at once its throat and heart, alarming all mankind ; a little *cur*, yelping with mingled fear and fury, at the same time, as it were, advancing backwards, in view of a fiendish tom-cat, with high-curved back, flaming eyes, and spitting fury. I only wish you had heard Mr. Titmouse on these occasions ; it might, perhaps, even have reminded you of the observation of Doctor Johnson, that genius is great natural powers accidentally directed.

Now there was, on a certain night, about three months after Titmouse had been in the House, a kind of pitched battle between the Ministry and their formidable opponents ; in which the speakers on each side did their best to prove (and in the opinion of many, *successfully*) that their opponents were apostates ; utterly worthless ; destitute alike of public and private virtue ; unfit to govern ; and unworthy of the confidence of the country, which aforesaid country was indeed in happy plight in possessing a Parliament unanimous in one thing at least—viz., its own worthlessness. My Lord Bulfinch rose late on the third evening of the debate—never had been seen so full a House during the session—and in a long and able speech contended (first), that the opposite side were selfish, ignorant, and dishonest ; and (secondly) that Ministers had only imitated their example. He was vehemently cheered from time to time, and sat down amidst a tempest of applause. Up then rose the ex-minister and leader of the opposition, and in a very few moments there was scarce a sound

to be heard, except that of the delicious voice—at once clear, harmonious distinct in utterance, and varied in intonation—of incomparably the finest Parliamentary orator of the day, Mr. Vivid. The hearts of those around him, who centred all their hopes in him, beat with anxious pride. He had a noble cast of countenance—a brilliant eye—strongly marked and most expressive features—a commanding figure—a graceful and winning address. His language, accurate, refined, copious, and vigorous, every word he uttered, *told*. His illustrations were as rich and apt as his reasonings were close and cogent; and his powers of ridicule were unrivalled. On the present occasion he was thoroughly roused, and put forth all his powers: he and Lord Bulfinch had been waiting for each other during the whole debate; but Mr. Vivid had at length secured the reply, and truly regarded himself as the mouthpiece of a great and slandered party in the state, whom he had risen to vindicate from the elaborate and envenomed aspersions of Lord Bulfinch, who sat, speedily pierced through and through with the arrows of poignant sarcasm, amidst the loud laughter of even his own side, so irresistible was the humour of the speaker. Even Mr. O’Gibbet, who had been from time to time exclaiming, half aloud, to those around—“Och, the pitiful fellow! The stupid baste!—Nivir mind him—divil a word, my lord!”—was at length subdued into silence. In fact, the whole House was rushing along with the rapid, brilliant, and impassioned speaker. Every now and then vehement and tumultuous cheering would burst forth from the opposition, answered by as vehement cheering from the ministerial benches; but you could not fail to observe an anxious and alarmed expression stealing over the faces of Lord Bulfinch’s supporters. His lordship sat immovably, with his arms folded, and eyes fixed on his opponent, and a bitter smile on his face, glancing frequently, however, with increasing anxiety towards Mr. O’Squeal, the only “great gun” he had left—that gentleman having undertaken (*infelix puer, atque impar congressus Achilli!*) to reply to Mr. Vivid. Poor Mr. O’Squeal himself looked pale and dispirited, and would probably have given up all his little prospects to be able to sneak away from the post he had so eagerly occupied, and devolve upon others the responsibility of replying to a speech looming more and more dreadfully upon his trembling faculties every moment, as infinitely more formidable in all points of view than anything he had anticipated. The speech must electrify the public, even as it was then electrifying the House. He held a sheet of paper in one hand, resting on his knees, and a pen in the other, with which he incessantly took notes—only to disguise his fright; for his mind went on with his pen—all he heard was above and beyond him: he might as well think of whistling down a whirlwind; yet there was no escape for him. Was the uneasy eye of Lord Bulfinch, more and more frequently directed towards him, calculated to calm or encourage him? or the sight of the adroit, sarcastic, and brilliant debater sitting opposite, who had his eye on Mr. O’Squeal, and was evidently to rise and reply to him? Mr. O’Squeal began to feel cold as death, and at length burst into a chilly perspiration. After a two hours’ speech, of uncommon power and brilliance, Mr. Vivid wound up with a rapid and striking recapitulation of the leading points of his policy when in power, which, he contended, were in triumphant contrast with those of his successors, which were wavering, inconsistent, perilous to every national interest, and in despicable subservience to the vilest and lowest impulses. “And now, sir,” said Mr. Vivid, turning to the Speaker, and then directing a bold and indignant glance of defiance at Lord Bulfinch—“does the noble lord opposite talk of *impeachment*? I ask him in the face of this House, and of the whole country, whose eyes are fixed upon it with anxiety and agitation—will he presume to repeat his threat? or will any one on his behalf?”—(turning a glance of withering scorn towards Mr. O’Squeal)—“Sir, I pause for a reply!”

—And he did—several seconds elapsing in dead silence, which was presently, however, broken in a manner that was perfectly unprecedented, and most astounding. 'Twas a reply to his question; but such as, had he anticipated it, he would never have put the question, or paused for its answer.

"*Cock-a-doodle-do-o-o-o!*" issued, with inimitable fidelity of tone and manner, from immediately behind Lord Bulfinch, who started from his seat as if he had been shot. Every one started; Mr. Vivid recoiled a pace or two from the table—and then a universal peal of laughter echoed from all quarters of the House, not excepting even the strangers' gallery. The Speaker was convulsed, and could not rise to call "order." Lord Bulfinch laughed himself almost into fits; even those immediately behind Mr. Vivid were giving way to uncontrollable laughter, at so comical an issue. He himself tried for a moment to join in the laugh, but in vain; he was terribly disconcerted and confounded. This frightful and disgusting incident had done away with the effect of his whole speech; and in twenty-four hours' time, the occurrence would be exciting laughter and derision in every corner of the kingdom.

"Order! order! order!" cried the Speaker, his face red and swollen with scarce subdued laughter. Several times Mr. Vivid attempted to resume, only, however, occasioning renewed laughter. Still he persevered; and, with much presence of mind, made a pointed and witty allusion to Rome saved by the cackling of a goose, in which manner he said the ministers hoped that night to be saved. 'Twas, however, plainly useless; and after a moment or two's pause of irresolution, he yielded to his fate, with visible vexation abruptly concluded his observations, gathered hastily together his papers, and resumed his seat and his hat—a signal for renewed laughter and triumphant cheering from the ministerial side of the House.

Up *then* started Mr. O'Squeal—(as it were under cover of the cock)—and, despite his absurd and extravagant gesticulation, and perfectly frightful tone of voice, dashed boldly off at one or two of the weakest points which had been made by his discomfited adversary, which he dealt with very dexterously; and then threw up a vast number of rhetorical fireworks, amidst the glitter and blaze of which he sat down, and was enthusiastically cheered. 'Twas my friend Mr. Titmouse that had worked this wonder, and entirely changed the fate of the day. Up rose Mr. O'Squeal's dreaded opponent—but in vain; he was quite crestfallen; evidently in momentary apprehension of receiving an interruption similar to that which Mr. Vivid had experienced. He was nervous and fidgety—as well he might be; and would most assuredly have shared the fate of Mr. Vivid, but that Titmouse was (not without great difficulty) restrained by Lord Bulfinch, on the ground that the desired effect had been produced, and would be only impaired by a repetition. The debate came somewhat abruptly to a close, and the opposition were beaten by a majority of a *hundred and thirty*—which really looked something like a working majority.

This happy occurrence at once brought Mr. Titmouse into notice, and very great favour with his party. How could it be otherwise, with even their leading speakers, who could scarce ever afterwards venture on anything a little out of the common way—a little higher flight than usual—being in momentary apprehension of being suddenly brought down by some such disgusting and ludicrous interruption as the one I have mentioned, indicating the effect which the speaker was producing upon—a cat, a donkey, a cock, or a puppy? Ah, me! what a sheep's eye each of them cast, as he went on, towards Titmouse? And if ever he was observed to be absent, there was a sensible improvement in the tone and spirit of the opposition speakers. The ministerial journals all over the country worked the joke well; and in their leading articles against any of Mr. Vivid's speeches, would "sum up all in one memorable word—'*cock-a-doodle-doo!*'"

As is generally the case, the signal success of Mr. Titmouse brought into the

field a host of imitators in the House; and their performances, inferior though they were becoming more and more frequent, gave quite a new character to the proceedings of that dignified deliberative assembly. At length, however, it was found necessary to pass a resolution of the House against such practices; and it was entered on the journals, that thenceforth no honourable member should interrupt business by whistling, singing, or imitating the sounds of animals, or making any other disgusting noise whatsoever.

The political importance thus acquired by Mr. Titmouse—and which he enjoyed till the passing of the above resolution, by which it was cut up root and branch—had naturally a very elevating effect upon him; as you might have perceived, had you only once seen him swaggering along the House to his seat behind the front Treasury bench, dressed in his usual style of fashion, and with his quizzing-glass stuck into his eye. Mr. O'Gibbet invariably greeted him with the utmost cordiality, and would often, at a pinching part of an opposition speech, turn round and invoke his powers, by the exclamation—"Now, now, Titty!" He dined, in due course, with the Speaker—as usual, in full court-dress; and, having got a little champagne in his head, insisted on going through his leading "imitations," infinitely to the amusement of some half dozen of the guests, and *all* the servants. His circle of acquaintance was extending every day; he became a very welcome guest, as an object of real curiosity. He was not a man, however, to be always enjoying the hospitality of others, without at least offering a return; and at the suggestion of an experienced friend in the House, he commenced a series of "parliamentary dinners" (presumptuous little puppy!) at the Gliddington Hotel. They went off with much *éclat*, and were duly chronicled in the daily journals, as thus:—

"On Saturday, Mr. Titmouse, M.P., entertained (his third dinner given this season) at the Gliddington Hotel, the following (amongst others) distinguished members of the House of Commons: Lord Nothing Nowhere, Sir Simper Silly, Mr. Flummery, Mr. O'Gibbet, Mr. Outlaw, Lord Beetle, Colonel Quod, and a dozen others."

Mr. Titmouse, at length, thought himself warranted in inviting Lord Bulfinch!—and the Speaker!—and Lord Firebrand (the Foreign Secretary); all of whom, however, very politely declined, pleading previous engagements. I can hardly, however, give Mr. Titmouse the credit of these latter proceedings; which were, in fact, suggested to him, in the first instance, by two or three young wags in the House, who, barring a little difference in the way of bringing up, were every wit as great fools and coxcombs as himself, and equally entitled to the confidence of their favoured constituencies and of the country, as so calculated for the purpose of practical legislation, and that remodelling of the institutions of the country, upon which the new House of Commons seemed bent.

'Twas truly delightful to see the tables of these young gentlemen groaning under daily accumulations of Parliamentary documents, containing all sorts of political and statistical information, collected and published with vast labour and expense, for the purpose of informing their powerful intellects upon the business of the country, so that they might come duly prepared to the important discussions in the House, on all questions of domestic and foreign policy. As for Mr. Titmouse, he never relished the idea of perusing and studying these troublesome and repulsive documents—page after page, filled with long rows of figures, tables of prices, of exchanges, etc., reports of the evidence, *verbatim et literatim*, taken in question and answer before every committee that sat; all sorts of expensive and troublesome "returns," moved for by any one that chose; he rather contented himself with attending to what went on in the House; and at the close of the session, all the documents in question became

the perquisite of his valet, who got a good round sum for them (uncut) as waste paper.

It is not difficult to understand the pleasure which my little friend experienced, in dispensing the little favours and courtesies of orders for the gallery, and franks, to those who applied for them; for all his show of feeling it a "bore" to be asked. 'Twas these little matters which, as it were, brought home to him a sense of his dignity, and made him *feel* the possession of station and authority. I know not but that the following application was more gratifying to him than any which he received :—

"T. Tag-rag's best respects to T. Titmouse, Esq., M.P., and begs to say how *greatly* he will account y^e favour of obtaining an order to be Admitted to the Gallery of the House of Commons for to-morrow night, to hear the debate on the Bill for Doing away with the *Nuisance* of Dustmen's cries of a morning. With Mrs. T.'s & daughter's respectful comp^{ts}."

"T. TITMOUSE, ESQ., M. P."

On receiving this, Titmouse looked out for the finest sheet of glossy extra-superfine gilt Bath post, scented, and in a fine flourishing hand, wrote as follows :—

"Please To Admit y^e Barer To The Galery of The House of Commons.—
T. TITMOUSE. Wednesday, March 6th, 18—."

But the reader, who must have been highly gratified by the unexpectedly rapid progress of Mr. Titmouse in Parliamentary life, will be, doubtless, as much interested by hearing that corresponding distinction awaited him in the regions of science and literature; his pioneer thither being one who had long enjoyed a very distinguishing eminence; successfully combining the character and pursuits of scholar and philosopher with those of a man of fashion—I mean a DOCTOR DIABOLUS GANDER. Though upwards of sixty, he found means so effectually to disguise his age, that he would have passed for barely forty. He had himself so strong a predilection for dress, that the moment he saw Titmouse he conceived a certain secret respect for that gentleman; and, in fact, the two dressed pretty nearly in the same style. The Doctor passed for a philosopher in society. He had spent most of his days in drilling youth in the elements of the mathematics; of which he had the same kind and degree of knowledge that is possessed of English literature by an old governess who has spent her life in going over the first part of Lindley Murray's English Grammar with children. Just so much did the Doctor know of the scope, the object, the application of the mathematics. His great distinguishing talent was, that of rendering the most abstruse science, "*popular*;"—*i.e.*, utterly unintelligible to those who *did* understand science, and very exciting and entertaining to those who did *not*. He had a knack of getting hold of obscure and starving men of genius and science, and secretly availing himself of their labours. He would pay them with comparative liberality to write, in an elegant style, on subjects of pure and mixed science; but when published, the name of *Diabolus Gander* would appear upon the title-page; and, to enable the Doctor to do this with some comfort to his conscience, he would actually copy out the whole of the manuscript, and make a few alterations in it. But, alas! *omne quod tetigit fœdavit*; and it invariably happened that these were the very *maculæ* pitched upon, exposed, and ridiculed by reviewers. No man could spread his small stock over a larger surface than Dr. Gander; no man be more successful in ingratiating himself with those persons so useful to an enterprising empiric—*viz.*, wealthy fools. He paid constant court to Titmouse, from the first moment he saw him; and took the liberty of calling—unasked—the very next day, at his rooms in the Albany. He soon satisfied Titmouse that he—Gander

—was a great philosopher, whom it was an advantage and a distinction to be acquainted with. He took my little admiring friend, for instance, to hear him—Gander—deliver a lecture at the Hanover Square Rooms, to a crowd of fashionable ladies and old gentlemen, who greatly applauded all he said, upon a subject equally abstruse, interesting, and instructive; viz., the occult qualities of *Triangles*. In short, he paid anxious and successful court to Titmouse, and was a very frequent guest at his dinner table. He gave Titmouse, on one of these occasions, an amazing account of the distinction accruing to a member of any of the great learned societies; and, in fact, quite inflamed his little imagination upon the subject—sounding him as to his wish to become a member of some great society, in common with half the dukes, marquesses, earls, and barons in the kingdom—in particular his own august kinsman, the Earl of Dreddlington himself.

“Why—a—’pon my soul—” quoth Titmouse grinning, as he tossed off his tenth glass of champagne, with the bland and voluble doctor—“I—I—shouldn’t much dislike a thingumbob or two at the end of my name—what’s the figure?”

“Certainly, I myself, as a zealous lover of science, my dear sir, consider her honours always well bestowed on those eminent in rank and station; though they may not have gone through the drudgery of scientific details, sir, their countenance *irradiates* the pale cheek of unobtrusive science——”

“Ya—a—s, ’pon honour, it certainly does,” quoth Titmouse, not exactly, however, comprehending the Doctor’s fine figure of speech.

“Now, look you, Mr. Titmouse,” continued the Doctor, “the greatest society in all England, out and out, is the Credulous Society. I happen to have some *leetle* influence there, through which I have been able, I am happy to say, to introduce several noblemen.” “Have you, by Jove?” cried Titmouse, “what the devil do they *do* there?” “Do, my dear sir! They meet for the purpose of—consider the distinguished men that are fellows of that society! It was only the other day that the Duke of Tadcaster told me (the very day after I had succeeded in getting his Grace elected), that he was as proud of the letters ‘F.C.S.’ added to his name, as he was of his dukedom!” “By Jove!—No—but—’pon honour bright—did he? Can you get *me* into it?” inquired Titmouse eagerly. “I—oh—why—you see, my very dear sir, you’re certainly rather young,” quoth the Doctor gravely, pausing and rubbing his chin; “*if* it could be managed, it would be a splendid thing for you—eh?” “By jingo, I should think so!” replied Titmouse. “I think I’ve been asked by at least a dozen noblemen for my influence, but I’ve not felt myself warranted——” “Oh, well! then *in course* there’s an end of it,” interrupted Titmouse with an air of disappointment; “and curse me if ever I cared a pin about it—I see I’ve not the ghost of a chance.” “I don’t know *that* either,” replied the Doctor musingly. His design had been all along to confer sufficient obligation on Titmouse, to induce him to lend the Doctor a sum of four or five hundreds pounds, to embark in some wild scheme or other, and also to make Titmouse useful to him for other purposes, from time to time.—“As you are so young, I am afraid it will be necessary in some sort of way to give you a sort of scientific pretension—ah, by Archimedes! but I have it!—I have it!—You see, I’ve a treatise in the press and nearly ready for publication, upon a particularly profound subject—but, you’ll understand me, explained in a perfectly popular manner—in fact, my dear sir, it is a grand discovery of my own, which will in future ages be placed side by side of that of Sir Isaac Newton——” “Is *he* a member of it too?” inquired Titmouse. “No, my dear sir!” quoth the Doctor, slightly staggered: “not bodily; but his *spirit* is with us! We feel it influencing all our deliberations; though he died a quarter of a century before we were established! But to return to the *discovery*

I was mentioning; as Sir Isaac discovered the principle of gravitation (otherwise weight, or heaviness), so, Mr. Titmouse, I have discovered the principle of lightness! "You don't say so! 'Pon my life, amazing!" exclaimed Mr. Titmouse. "And equally true, as amazing. As soon as I shall have indicated its tendencies and results, my discovery will effect a revolution in the existing system of physical science."

"Ah! that's what they talked about in the House last night—*Revolution*. 'Pon my soul, I don't like revolutions though—Folks *fight* then—eh?" exclaimed Titmouse uneasily.

"I am speaking of something quite different, my dear Titmouse," said Dr. Gander, with a slight appearance of pique; "but to proceed with what I had intended. Since I have been sitting here, my dear sir, it has occurred to me that I have an excellent opportunity of evincing my sense of your kindness towards me, and my appreciation of your distinguished position—Sir, I intend to dedicate my work to you!"

"Sir, you're amazing kind—most uncommon polite!" quoth Titmouse, who had not the slightest notion of what a "dedication" meant.—Within a week or two's time, sure enough appeared a handsome octavo volume, beautifully printed and splendidly bound, entitled,

"RESEARCHES into *Physical Science*, with a view to the Establishment of a NEW PRINCIPLE—

LIGHTNESS.

BY

DIABOLUS GANDER, ESQUIRE,

LL.D.; F.C.S.; Q.U.A.K.; G.Ö.S.;

Secretary to the *Empirical Society*; Corresponding Member of the *Leipzig Lunatic Society*; Vice-President of the *Peripatetic Gastronomic Association*; and Member of Seventeen Philosophical and Literary Societies in Kamschatka, Madagascar, Tartary, and Little Britain; etc., etc., etc."

And it bore the following "Dedication"—

"TO TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE, ESQUIRE, M.P., etc., etc., etc.,

This volume is respectfully inscribed,

by his obedient, obliged,

faithful humble servant,

DIABOLUS GANDER."

The work being vigorously pushed, and systematically puffed in all directions, of course brought the honoured name of Mr. Titmouse a good deal before the scientific public; and about three weeks afterwards might have been seen the following "Testimonial," suspended against the screen of the public room of the Credulous Society, in support of Mr. Titmouse's pretensions to be elected into it:—

"TESTIMONIAL.—We, the undersigned, Fellows of the Credulous Society, hereby certify that, from our personal knowledge of Tittlebat Titmouse, Esquire, M.P., we believe him to be a gentleman greatly attached to credulous science, and equally capable and desirous of promoting its interests; and, as such, deserving of being elected a fellow of the Credulous Society.

"DREDDLINGTON.

"TANTALLAN.

WOODEN SPOON.

"FLIMSY CROTCHET.

"DIABOLUS GANDER.

"PERIWINKLE PARALLELOGRAM.

"PLACID NOODLE."

The above distinguished names were procured by Dr. Gander ; and thereupon the election of Mr. Titmouse became almost a matter of certainty—especially as, on the appointed day, Dr. Gander procured the attendance of some amiable old gentlemen, fellows of the Society, who believed the Doctor to be all he pretended to be. The above testimonial having been read from the chair, Mr. Titmouse was balloted for, and declared elected unanimously a Fellow of the Credulous Society. He was prevented from attending on the ensuing meeting by a great debate, and an expected early division : then (I regret to say), by sheer intoxication ; and again by his being unable to return in time from Croydon, where he had been attending a grand prize-fight, being the backer of one of the principal ruffians, Billy Bully, his boxing-master. On the fourth evening, however, having dined with the Earl of Dreddlington, he drove with his lordship to the Society's apartments, was formally introduced, and solemnly admitted ; from which time—the proudest moment of his life—he was entitled to have his name stand thus :—"Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq. M.P., F.C.S."—And Heaven knows how much higher he might not have immediately mounted, in the scale of social distinction, but that he came to a very sudden rupture with his "guide, philosopher, and friend." Dr. Gander, who, on at length venturing to make his long-meditated application to Titmouse for a temporary loan, to enable him, Dr. Gander, to prosecute some extensive philosophical experiments—[i.e., *inter nos*, on public credulity]—was unhesitatingly refused by Titmouse ; who, on being pressed by the Doctor, abused him in no very choice terms—and finally ordered him out of the room ! He quitted the presence of his ungrateful protégé with disgust, and in despair—nor without reason, for that very night he received a propulsion towards the Fleet Prison, which suggested to his philosophical mind several ingenious reflections concerning the *attraction of repulsion*. There he lay for three months, till he sent for the creditor who had deposited him there, and who had been his bookseller and publisher ; and the Doctor so dazzled him by the outline of a certain literary speculation—to be called the Gander Gallery—that his credulous creditor relented, and set his ingenious and enterprising debtor once more at large.

But to return to Mr. Titmouse. It was not long after his election into the Credulous Society, that a deputation from the committee of the Society for the *Promotion of Civil and Religious Discord* waited upon him at his apartments in the Albany, to solicit him, in terms the most flattering and complimentary, to preside at their next annual meeting at the Stonemasons' Hall ; and, after some modest expressions of distrust as to his fitness for so distinguished a post, he yielded to their anxious entreaties. He ordered in, while they were with him, a very substantial lunch, of which they partook with infinite relish ; and having done ample justice to his wines and spirits, the worthy gentlemen withdrew, charmed with the intelligence and affability of their distinguished host, and anticipating that they should have in Mr. Titmouse one of the most rising young men in the Liberal line, a very effective chairman, and who would make their meeting go off with great *éclat*. How Titmouse would have got through the task he had undertaken, the reader must be left to conjecture ; seeing that, in point of fact, "circumstances, over which he had no control," prevented him from fulfilling his promise. The meeting waited for him for at least three-quarters of an hour ; when, finding that neither he nor any tidings of him came, they elected some one else into the chair, and got on as well as they could. I dare say the reader is rather curious to know how all this came to pass ; and I feel it my duty to state the reason frankly. On the evening of the day before that on which he had promised to preside at Stonemasons' Hall, he dined out with one or two choice spirits ; and, about two o'clock in the morning, they all sallied forth, not a bit the *better* for wine,

in quest of adventures. Mr. Titmouse gave some excellent imitations of donkeys, cats, and pigs, as they walked along arm in arm; and very nearly succeeded in tripping up an old watchman, who had crawled out to announce the hour. Then they rung every bell they passed; and, encouraged by impunity, proceeded to sport of a still more interesting description—viz., twisting knockers off doors. Titmouse was by far the most drunk of the party, and wrenched off several knockers in a very resolute manner, placing them successively in his pocket—where, also, his companions contrived, unknown to him, to deposit *their* spoils—till the weight was such as seriously to increase the difficulty of keeping his balance. When tired of this sport, it was agreed that they should extinguish every lamp they passed. No sooner said than done; and Titmouse volunteered to commence. Assisted by his companions, he clambered up a lamp-post at the corner of St. James's Street; and holding with one hand by the bar, while his legs clung round the iron post, with the other hand he opened the window of the lamp; and while in the act of blowing it out, "Watch! watch!" cried the voices of several people rushing round the corner; a rattle was swung; away scampered his companions in different directions; and after holding on where he was for a moment or two, in confusion and alarm, down slid poor Titmouse, and dropped into the arms of three accursed watchmen, around whom was gathered a little crowd of persons, all of whom had been roused from sleep by the pulling of their bells, and the noise made in wrenching off their knockers. A pretty passion they all were in, shaking their fists in the face of the captured delinquent, and accompanying him, with menacing gestures, to the watch-house. There having been safely lodged, he was put into a dark cell, where he presently fell asleep; nor did he wake until he was summoned to go off to the police-office. There he found a host of victims of his over-night's exploits. He stoutly denied having been concerned in despoiling a single door of its knocker—on which a breeches-maker near him furiously lifted up the prisoner's heavy coat-tails, and exclaimed eagerly—"Your worship, your worship! see, he's got his knocket full of pockers! he's got his knocket full of pockers—see here, your worship—" "What *do* you mean, sir, by such gibberish?" inquired the magistrate, in so stern a tone as drew the speaker's attention to the little transposition of letters which he had made in his haste to detect the falsehood of the delinquent; who, finding the dismal strait to which he was driven, and feeling really very ill, begged for mercy—which, after a very severe rebuke, the pallid culprit being confronted by seven knockers lying before him in a row, all of them having been taken out of his own pockets, he obtained, on condition of his compensation to the injured parties, who compounded with him for twelve pounds. After paying a couple of pounds to the poor-box, he was discharged; crawled into a coach, and, in a very sad condition, reached his rooms about one o'clock, and got into bed in a truly deplorable state—never once recollecting that, at that precise hour, he ought to have been taking the chair of the meeting of the Society for the Promotion of Civil and Religious Discord. As, however, his misfortunes were, in the newspapers, assigned, not to "Tittlebat Titmouse," but to one "*John Smith*," the exact state of the case never transpired to the worthy gentlemen who had been so unaccountably deprived of his services; and who, on inquiry, were told by his fluent valet, that Mr. Titmouse's late hours at the House had brought on a slight and sudden attack of—jaundice; on hearing which, they begged he might be assured of their respectful sympathy, and hearty wishes for his restoration; and tried very hard to sound the valet on the subject of his master's compensating for his absence by some donation or subscription; but the fellow was very obtuse, and they were compelled to depart disappointed.

I should have thought that the foregoing would have proved a lesson to Mr. Titmouse, and restrained him for some time from yielding to his cursed pro-

pensity to drink. Yet was it otherwise. Within a fortnight after the mischance which I have above described, Titmouse dined with the members of a sort of pugilistic club, which met every fortnight, for the purpose of settling matters connected with the "ring." On the present occasion there had been a full muster, for they had to settle the preliminaries for a grand contest for the championship of England—to which Titmouse's master, Mr. Billy Bully, aspired. Titmouse had scarcely ever enjoyed himself more than on that occasion; and, confident of his man, had backed his favourite pretty freely. Towards eleven o'clock, he found the room very close—and it was not to be wondered at, when you considered the dreadful quantity of hard ale, harder port wine, and poisonous gin and water, which the little wretch had swallowed since sitting down to dinner—however, about the hour I have named, he, Sir Pumpkin Puppy, and one or two others, all with cigars in their mouths, sallied forth to walk about town, in search of sport. I have hardly patience to write it—but positively they had not got half way down the Haymarket when they got into a downright "*row*;" and, egged on by his companions, and especially inwardly impelled by the devil himself, the miserable Titmouse, after grossly insulting a little one-eyed, one-legged, bald-headed old waterman, attached to the coach-stand there, challenged him to fight, and forthwith flung away his cigar, and threw himself into boxing attitude, amidst the jeers and laughter of the spectators—who, however, formed a sort of a ring in a trice. At it they went, *instantly*. Titmouse squared about with a sort of disdainful showiness—in the midst of which he suddenly received a nasty teaser on his nose and shoulder, from his active, hardy, and experienced antagonist, which brought him to the ground, the blood gushing from his nose in a copious stream. Sir Pumpkin quickly picked him up, shook him, and set him fairly at his man again. Nearer and nearer stumped the old fellow to the devoted "swell," who, evidently groggy, squared in the most absurd way imaginable for a moment or two, when he received his enemy's *one two* in his eye, and on his mouth, and again dropped down.

"He's drunk—he can't fight no more than a baby; I won't stand against him any more," quoth the fair and stout-hearted old waterman. "It warn't any o' my seeking; but if he thought to come it over an old cripple like me——"

"Bravo! bravo!" cried his comrades. "Come along, old chap—come along!" said one; "if I don't give you a jolly quartern, may I stick here without a fare all this blessed night;" and the speaker led off the victor to the public-house opposite, while Titmouse's friends led him off, nearly insensible, to a tavern a few doors off.

Having given directions that he should be forthwith taken to a bedroom and washed, they ordered broiled bones and mulled claret for themselves. After about an hour and a half's nap, Titmouse, who probably had benefited rather than suffered from his bloodletting, rejoined his friends, and called for a cigar and a glass of cold brandy and water; having had which, they set off homeward: he reaching his rooms about one o'clock, with a very black eye, a swollen nose and mouth, a very thick and indistinct speech, and unsteady step; in fact, in a much worse pickle than he had as yet exhibited to his valet, who told him, while preparing for him a glass of brandy and soda-water, that no fewer than five messengers had been at his rooms. While he was yet speaking, a thundering knock was heard at the outer door, and on its being opened, in rushed, breathlessly, Mr. Phelim O'Doodle.

"Titmouse!—Titmouse! Och, murther and thunder, where are ye? Where have ye been, wid ye?" he gasped—

"When—a—hen—on—water—swims—
Too-ra-laddy—
Too-ra-lad-lad-lad"—

drowsily sung Titmouse—it being part of a song he had heard thrice encored that evening after dinner—at the same time staggering towards O'Doodle.

"Och botheration take your too-ra-laddy! Come, fait—by Jasus! clap your hat on and button your coat, and off to the House—immediately—or it's all up with us, an' out we go every mother's son of us—an' the bastely Tories 'll be in. Come! come!—off wid ye, I say! I've a coach at the door——" "I—(hiccup)—I sha'n't—can't—'pon my life——" "Och, off wid ye?—isn't it mad that Mr. O'Gibbet is wid ye?—" "He's one eye,—ah, ha!—and one leg—Too-ra-laddy," hiccuped the young senator. "Divil burn me if I don't tie ye hand an' foot together!" cried O'Doodle impetuously. "What the divil have ye been about wid that black eye o' yours, and—but I'll spake about it in the coach. Off wid ye! Isn't time worth a hundred pounds a minute——"

Within a minute or two's time O'Doodle had got him safely into the coach, and down to St. Stephen's they rattled at top speed. *There* was going on, indeed, a desperate fight—a final trial of strength between Ministers and the Opposition, on a vote of want of confidence; and a division expected every minute. Prodigious had been the efforts of both parties—the whip unprecedented. Lord Bulfinch had, early in the evening, explicitly stated that Ministers would resign unless they gained a *majority*: and to their infinite vexation and astonishment, three of their staunch adherents—Titmouse being one—were missing just at the critical moment. The Opposition had been more fortunate; every man of theirs had come up—and they were shouting tremendously, "Divide! divide! divide!"—while, on the other hand, Ministers were putting up men, one after another, to speak against time (though not one syllable they said could be heard), in order to get a chance of their three missing men coming up.

If none of them came, Ministers would be exactly even with their opponents; in which case they were very much afraid that they ought to resign. Up the stairs and into the lobby came O'Doodle breathlessly, with his prize.

"Och, my *dear* O'Doodle!—Titmouse ye little drunken divil, where have ye been?" commenced Mr. O'Gibbet, on whom O'Doodle stumbled suddenly.

"Thank heaven! Good God, how fortunate!" exclaimed Mr. Flummery, both he and O'Gibbet being in a state of intense anxiety and great excitement.

"In with him!—in with him!—by Jove, they're clearing the gallery!" gasped Mr. Flummery, while he rushed into the House, to make the way clear for O'Doodle and O'Gibbet who were literally carrying in Titmouse between them.

"Sir!—Mr. Flummery!" gasped O'Doodle,—"*ye* won't forget what I've done to-night, will ye?" "No, no—honour! In with you! In with you! A moment and all's lost."

They reached, however, the House in safety, Mr. O'Gibbet waving his hand in triumph.

"Oh, ye droll little divil! where have ye been hiding?" he hastily whispered, as he deposited the insensible Titmouse on the nearest bench, and sat beside him. Mr. O'Gibbet took off his hat, and wiped his reeking head and face. Gracious heavens! what a triumph!—and in the very nick of time.—Titmouse had saved the Ministry! Tremendous was now the uproar in the House, almost every one present shouting, "Divide!—divide!"

"Strangers, withdraw," cried the Speaker.

Then *at it* they went, with an air of tumultuous and irrepressible excitement; but, through Titmouse, the Ministers triumphed. The numbers were announced—

Ayes . . .	301
Noes . . .	300

Majority for Ministers . . . 1

On which glorious result, there burst forth immense cheering on the ministerial side of the House, and vehement counter-cheering on the opposition side, which lasted for several minutes. The noise indeed was so prodigious that it almost roused Titmouse from the sort of stupor into which he had sunk. Mr. O'Doodle accompanied him home; and, after drinking a couple of tumblers of whisky and water with him, took his departure—caring nothing that he had left Titmouse on the floor, in a state of insensibility; from which, however, in due time he recovered, but was confined to his bed, by a violent bilious attack, for nearly a week. Mr. O'Doodle's services to the Government were not forgotten. A few days afterwards he vacated his seat, having received the appointment of sub-inspector of political caricatures in Ireland, with a salary of six hundred pounds a-year for life. His place in the House was immediately filled up by his brother, Mr. Trigger O'Doodle, who kept a shooting gallery in Dublin. Profuse were Phelim's thanks to Mr. O'Gibbet, when that gentleman announced to him his good fortune, exclaiming at the same time, with a sly wink and smile—"Ye see what it is to rinder service to the state—ah, ha! Aisy, aisy!—softly, say I. Isn't that the way to get along?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE injuries which Titmouse had received in his encounter with the waterman—I mean principally his black eye—prevented him from making his appearance in public, or at Lord Dreddlington's, or in the House, for several days after he had recovered from the bilious attack of which I have spoken. His non-attendance at the House, however, signified little, since both parties had been so thoroughly exhausted by their late trial of strength, as to require for some time rest and quietness, to enable them to resume the public business of the country. As soon as his eye was fairly convalescent, the first place to which he ventured out was his new residence in Park Lane, which, having been taken for him under the superintendence of the Earl of Dreddlington and Mr. Gammon, was now rapidly being furnished, in order to be in readiness to receive his lady and himself, immediately after his marriage—his parliamentary duties not admitting of a prolonged absence from town. His marriage with the Lady Cecilia had, as usual, been already prematurely announced in the newspapers several times, as on the eve of taking place. Their courtship went on very easily and smoothly. Neither of them seemed *anxious* for the other's society, though they contrived to evince, in the presence of others, a decent degree of gratification at meeting each other. He did all which he was instructed it was necessary for a man of fashion to do. He attended her and the Earl to the opera repeatedly, as also to other places of fashionable resort: he had danced with her occasionally; but, to tell the truth, it was only at the vehement instance of the Earl her father, that she ever consented to stand up with one whose person, whose carriage, whose motions were so unutterably vulgar and ridiculous as those of Mr. Titmouse, who was yet her affianced husband. He had made her several times rather expensive presents of jewellery, and would have purchased for her a great stock of clothing (of which he justly considered himself an excellent judge), if she would have permitted it. He had, moreover, been a constant guest at the Earl's table, where he was under greater restraint than anywhere else. Of such indiscretions and eccentricities as I have just been recording, they knew, or were properly *supposed* to know, nothing. 'Twas not for them to have their eyes upon him while sowing his wild oats—so thought the Earl; who, however, had frequent occasion for congratulating himself in respect of Mr. Titmouse's

political celebrity, and also of the marks of distinction conferred upon him in the literary and scientific world, of which the Earl was himself so distinguished an ornament. Titmouse had presented copies, gorgeously bound, of Dr. Gander's Treatise on Lightness, both to the Earl and the Lady Cecilia; and the very flattering *dedication* to Titmouse, by Dr. Gander, really operated not a little in his favour with his future lady. What effect might have been produced upon her ladyship, had she been apprised of the fact that the aforesaid dedication had appeared in only a hundred copies, having been cancelled directly Dr. Gander had ascertained the futility of his expectations from Titmouse, I do not know; but I believe she never was apprised of the fact. As far as his dress went, she had contrived, through the interference of the Earl and of Mr. Gammon, (for whom she had conceived a singular respect), to abate a *little* of its fantastic absurdity—its execrable vulgarity. Nothing, however, seemed capable of effecting any material change in *the man*, although his continued intercourse with refined society could hardly fail to effect *some* advantageous change in his *manners*. As for anything further, Tittlebat Titmouse remained the same vulgar, heartless, presumptuous, ignorant creature he had ever been. Though I perceive in the Lady Cecilia no qualities to excite our respect or affection, I pity her from my very soul when I contemplate her coming union with Titmouse. One thing I know, that as soon as ever she had bound herself irrevocably to him, she began to think of at least fifty men whom she had ever spurned, but whom *now* she would have welcomed with all the ardour and affection of which her cold nature was susceptible. As she had never been *conspicuous* for animation, vivacity, or energy, the gloom which more and more frequently overshadowed her, whenever her thoughts turned towards Titmouse, attracted scarce anyone's attention. There *were* those, however, who could have spoken of her mental disquietude at the approach of her cheerless nuptials—I mean her maid Annette and Miss Macspleuchan. To say that she *loathed* the bare idea of her union with Titmouse—of his person, manners, and character—would not perhaps be exactly correct, since she had not the requisite strength of character; but she contemplated her future lord with mingled feelings of apprehension, dislike, and disgust. Heaven had denied poor Lady Cecilia all power of contemplating the future; of anticipating consequences; of *reflecting* upon the step she was about to take. Miss Macspleuchan, however, did so for her; but being placed in a situation of great delicacy and difficulty, acted with cautious reserve whenever the subject was mentioned. Lady Cecilia had not vouchsafed to consult her before her ladyship had finally committed herself to Titmouse; and, after that, interference was useless and unwarrantable.

Lady Cecilia late one afternoon entered her dressing-room, pale and dispirited, as had been latterly her wont; and, with a deep sigh, sank into her easy-chair. Annette was leaning against the window-frame, reading a book, which she immediately closed and laid down. "What are you reading there?" inquired Lady Cecilia, languidly.

"Oh, nothing particular, my lady!" replied Annette, colouring a little; "it was only the prayer-book. I was looking at the marriage-service, my lady. I wanted to see what it was that your ladyship has to say——" "It's not very amusing, Annette. I think it very dull and stupid." "La, my lady—now I should have thought it quite *interesting*, if I had been in your la'ship's situation!" "Well, what is it that they expect me to repeat?" "Oh! I'll read it, my lady—here it is," replied Annette, and read as follows:—"Then shall the priest say unto the woman, 'N, wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband, to live together, after God's ordinance, in the holy state of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, serve him, love, honour, and keep him, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live? The woman shall answer, 'I will.'"

"Well—it's only a form, you know, Annette—and I daresay no one ever gives it a thought," said Lady Cecilia, struggling to suppress a sigh.

"Then," continued Annette, "your la'ship will have to say a good deal after the parson—but I beg your la'ship's pardon—it's (in your case) the bishop. Here it is :—I, N, take thee, M, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish——"

"Yes, yes—I hear," interrupted Lady Cecilia faintly, turning pale; "I know it all—that will do, Annette——"

"There's only a word more, my Lady :—'And obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth.' All this your la'ship says, with your right hand holding Mr. Titmouse's."

Here a visible tremor passed through Lady Cecilia. "You may leave me alone, Annette, a little while," said she; "I don't feel quite well." "La, my lady, a'n't your la'ship late already? Your la'ship knows how early her Grace dines ever since her illness."

"There's plenty of time; I'll ring for you when I want you. And—stay—you may as well leave your prayer-book with me for a moment—it will amuse me to look in it." Annette did as she was bid; and the next moment her melancholy mistress was alone. She did not, however, open the book she had asked for, but fell into a reverie, which was disturbed only by her maid tapping at the door; and who, on entering, told her that she had not one moment to lose; that his lordship had been dressed for some time. On this her ladyship rose, and commenced her toilet with a very deep sigh.

"Your la'ship, I suppose, wears your gold-coloured satin? it matches so well with the pearls," said Annette, going to the jewel-case.

"I sha'n't wear any pearls to-day."

"Oh! my lady! not that beautiful spray of Mr. Titmouse's; your la'ship does look so well in it." "I sha'n't wear anything of Mr. Tit—I mean," she added colouring, "I sha'n't wear *anything* in my hair to-day!"

Many and anxious, it may be easily believed, had been the conferences and negotiations between the Earl, Mr. Titmouse, and Mr. Gammon, with reference to the state of his property, and the settlement to be made on Lady Cecilia. It appeared that the extent of the incumbrances on the Yatton property was £35,000, and which Gammon had many ways of accounting for, without disclosing the amount of plunder which had fallen to the share of the firm—or rather to the senior partner. The interest on this sum (£1,750) would reduce Mr. Titmouse's present income to £8,250 per annum; but Gammon pledged himself that the rental of the estates could, with the greatest ease, be raised to £12,000, and that measures, in fact, were already in progress to effect so desirable a result. Then there was a sum of £20,000 due to Mr. Titmouse from Mr. Aubrey, on account of the mesne profits, £10,000 of which was guaranteed by Lord De la Zouch, and would very shortly become payable with interest; and the remaining £10,000 could be at any time called in. The sum finally determined upon, as a settlement upon Lady Cecilia, was £3,000 a-year—surely a very substantial "*consideration*" for the "faithful *promise*" to be, by-and-by, made by her at the altar—and which, moreover, she conceived she had a prospect of having entirely to herself—really "for her *separate* use, exempt from the control, debts, and engagements of her said intended husband." I am sorry to say that Lady Cecilia clung to the prospect of an almost immediate *separation*; which, she learned from several confidential friends, some of whom were qualified by personal experience to offer an opinion, was a very easy matter, becoming daily more frequent on the ground of incompatibility of temper. A faint hint of the kind which she had once dropped to Miss Macspleuchan, was received in such a manner as prevented her from ever

repeating it. As for the Earl, her father, I cannot say that he did not observe a depression of spirits in his daughter, increasing with the increasing proximity of her marriage. Since, however, *he* had entirely reconciled *himself* to it—and was delighted at the approaching long-coveted reunion of the family interests—he did not think of *her* having any objection to the arrangements. As for her lowness of spirits, doubtless every woman on the point of being married experienced similar feelings. In short, the affair seemed to be going on just as it ought to do; and even had it assumed an untoward aspect, circumstances had arisen which would have prevented the Earl from giving his wonted attention to what in any degree concerned his daughter. In the first place, on his lordship's party coming into power, to his infinite amazement his old post of Lord High Steward was filled up by some one else! So also was the office of Lord President of the Council; and so, moreover, was every other office; and that, too, without any apology to the offended peer, or explanation of such a phenomenon as his entire exclusion from office. The Premier, in fact, had never once thought of his lordship while forming his administration; and on being subsequently remonstrated with by a venerable peer, a common friend of the Premier and Lord Dreddlington, the Premier very calmly expressed his regret that Lord Dreddlington had not given him notice of his being still disposed to hold office; and trusted that he should yet be able, and before any long time should have elapsed, to avail himself of the very valuable services "of my Lord Dreddlington." This was all that he could get from the Premier; and, for a long while, the Earl could think of only one mode of soothing his wounded feelings—viz., going about to his friends, and demonstrating that the new Lord Steward and the new Lord President were every day displaying their unfitness for office; and that the only error committed by the Premier, in the responsible task of forming a government, was that of selecting two such individuals as he had appointed to those distinguished posts. He was also greatly comforted and supported at this period of vexation and disappointment by the sympathy of—Mr. Gammon, who had succeeded in gaining a prodigious ascendancy over the Earl, who, on the sudden death of his own solicitor, old Mr. Pounce, adopted Gammon in his stead; and infinitely rejoiced his lordship was, to have thus secured the services of one who possessed an intellect at once so practical, masterly, and energetic; who had formed so high an estimate of his lordship's powers; and whom his lordship's condescending familiarity never for one moment caused to lose sight of the vast distance and difference between them. He appeared, moreover, to act between Titmouse and the Earl with the scrupulous candour and fidelity of a high-minded person, consciously placed in a situation of peculiar delicacy and responsibility. At the least, he seemed exceedingly anxious to secure Lady Cecilia's interests; and varied—or *appeared* to vary—the arrangements, according to every suggestion of his lordship. The Earl was satisfied that Gammon was disposed to make Titmouse go much further than of his own accord he would have felt disposed to go, towards meeting the Earl's wishes in the matter of the settlements.

But this was not the only mode by which he augmented and secured his influence over the weak old peer. Not only had Gammon diminished the drain upon his lordship's income, which had so long ago existed in the shape of interest upon money lent him on mortgage, not only, I say, had Gammon done all this, but infinitely more;—he had enabled his lordship, as it were, "to strike a blow in a new hemisphere," and at once evince his fitness for the conduct of complicated affairs of business, acquire an indefinite augmentation of fortune, and also great influence and popularity.

England, about the time I am speaking of, was smitten with a sort of mercantile madness—which showed itself in the shape of a monstrous passion for JOINT-STOCK COMPANIES. John Bull all of a sudden took it into his head,

that no commercial undertaking of the least importance could any longer be carried on by means of *individual* energy, capital, and enterprise. A glimmering of this great truth he discovered that he had had from the first moment that a private *partnership* had been adopted; and it was only to follow out the principle—to convert a private into a public partnership, and call it a “Joint-stock Company.” This bright idea of John’s produced prompt and prodigious results—a hundred *joint-stock companies* “rose like an exhalation” in the metropolis alone, within one twelvemonth’s time. But then came the question, *upon what* were these grand combined forces to operate! Undertakings of commensurate magnitude must be projected—and so it was. It really matters not a straw how wild and ludicrously impracticable was a project—it had but to be started and announced, to call forth monied people among all classes, all *making haste to be rich*—and ready to back the speculation, even to the last penny they had in the world; pouring out their capital with a recklessness, of which the lamentable *results* may prevent their occurrence. Any voluble visionary who was unluckily able to reach the ear of one or two persons in the city, could expand his crotchets into a “company” with as little effort as an idiot could blow out a soap-bubble. For instance: one wiseacre conceived a plan for creating artificial rain at an hour’s notice, over any extent of country short of a circle of three miles in diameter; a second, for conveying milk to every house in the metropolis in the same way as water is at present conveyed—viz., by pipes, supplied by an immense reservoir of milk to be established at Islington, and into which a million of cows were to be milked night and morning; a third, for converting *saw-dust into solid wood*; and a fourth, for surrounding the metropolis with a wall twenty feet in thickness, and fifty in height. Within three days of each of these hopeful speculations being announced, there were as many completely organized joint-stock companies established to carry them into effect. Superb offices were engaged in the city; Patrons, Presidents, Vice-Presidents; Trustees, Chairmen, Directors; Secretaries, Actuaries, Architects, Auditors; Bankers, Standing Counsel, Engineers, Surveyors, and Solicitors, appointed: and the names of all these functionaries forthwith blazed in dazzling array at the head of a “Prospectus,” which set forth the advantage of the undertaking with such seductive eloquence as no man could resist: and within a week’s time there was not a share to be had in the market. Into affairs of this description, Mr. Gammon, who soon saw the profit to be made out of them, plunged with the energy and excitement of a gamester. He drew in Mr. Quirk after him; and, as they could together command the ears of several enterprising capitalists, they soon had their hands full of business, and launched two or three very brilliant speculations. Mr. Gammon himself drew up their “*Prospectuses*,” and in a style which must have tempted the very devil himself (had he seen them) into venturing half his capital in the undertaking! One was a scheme for providing the metropolis with a constant supply of salt water by means of a canal cut from the vicinity of the Nore, and carried nearly all round London, so as to afford the citizens throughout the year the luxury of sea-bathing. Another was of a still more extraordinary description—for carrying into effect a discovery, by means of which ships could be furnished with the means, by one and the same process—and that remarkably simple, cheap, and convenient—of obtaining *pure, fresh water* from the sea, and converting the salt or brine thrown off in the operation, *instantly* into *gunpowder*! The reality of this amazing discovery was decisively ascertained by three of the greatest chemists in England; a patent was taken out, and a company formed for immediately working the patent. This undertaking was the first that Gammon brought under the notice of the Earl of Dreddlington, whom he so completely dazzled by his description, both of the service to be conferred upon the country, and the

princely revenue to be derived from it to those early entering into the speculation, that his lordship intimated rather an anxious wish to be connected with it.

"Good gracious, sir!" said his lordship, with an air of wonder—"to what a pitch is science advancing! When will human ingenuity end? Sir, I doubt not that one of these days *everything* will be found out!"

"Certainly—I feel the full force of your lordship's very striking observation," replied Gammon, who had listened to him with an air of delighted deference. "Sir, this is a truly astonishing discovery! Yet, I give you my honour, sir, I have often thought that something of the kind was very desirable, as far as the obtaining fresh water from salt water was concerned, and have wondered whether it could ever be practicable: but I protest the latter part of the discovery—the conversion of the brine into gunpowder—is—is—sir, I say it is—astounding: it is more; it is very interesting, in a picturesque and patriotic point of view. Only think, sir, of our vessels gathering gunpowder and fresh water from the sea they are sailing over! Sir, the discoverer deserves a subsidy! This must in due time be brought before Parliament." His lordship got quite excited; and Gammon, watching his opportunity, intimated the pride and pleasure it would give him to make his lordship the patron of the gigantic undertaking.

"Sir—sir—you do me—infinite honour," quoth the Earl, quite flustered by the suddenness of the proposal.

"As there will be, of course, your lordship sees, several great capitalists concerned, I must, for form's sake, consult them before any step is taken; but I flatter myself, my lord, that there can be but one opinion, when I name to them the possibility of our being honoured with your lordship's name and influence."

The Earl received this with a stately bow and a gratified smile; and on the ensuing day received a formal communication from Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, soliciting his lordship to become the patron of the undertaking—which he most graciously acceded to, and was easily prevailed on to secure several other highly distinguished names among his friends, who were profoundly ignorant of business in all its departments, but delighted to figure before the public as the patrons of so great and laudable an enterprise. Out went forthwith, all over the country, the prospectuses of the new company, and which could boast such names as cast most of its sister companies into the shade—*e.g.*, "The Right Honourable the Earl of Dreddlington, G.C.B., F.R.S., F.A.S., etc., etc."—"The Most Noble the Duke of Tantallan, K.T., etc., etc."—"The Most Honourable the Marquess of Marmalade, etc., etc., etc." The capital to be one million, in ten thousand shares of one hundred pounds each. Lord Dreddlington was presented with a hundred shares, as a mark of respect and gratitude from the leading shareholders; moreover, his lordship took two hundred shares besides, and prevailed on various of his friends to do the same. In less than three weeks' time the shares had risen to £40 premium—[*i.e.*, my lady readers will understand, each share for which his lordship was supposed to have given, or to be liable to be called upon for £100, he could at any moment dispose of for £140]—and then Mr. Gammon so represented matters to his lordship, as to induce him to part with his shares, which he found no difficulty in doing—and thereby realized a clear profit of £12,000. This seemed to the Earl rather the effect of magic than of an everyday mercantile adventure. His respect for Gammon rose with everything he heard of that gentleman, or saw him do; and his lordship allowed himself to be implicitly guided by him in all things. Under his advice, accordingly, the Earl became interested in several other similar speculations; all which exercises so occupied his thoughts as almost to obliterate his sense of ministerial injustice. Several of his friends

cautioned him, now and then, against committing himself to such novel and extensive speculations, in which he might incur, he was reminded, dangerous liabilities; but his magnificent reception of such interference soon caused their discontinuance. The Earl felt himself safe in the hands of Mr. Gammon.

His lordship's attention having been thus directed to such subjects he soon began to take a vast interest in the discussion of such subjects in the House. Absorbing, however, as were these and similar occupations, they were almost altogether suspended as soon as a day—and that not a distant one—had been fixed upon for the marriage of his daughter with Mr. Titmouse. From that moment the old man could scarcely bear her out of his presence; following and watching all her movements with a peculiar, though still a stately, solicitude and tenderness. Frequent, earnest, and dignified were his interviews with Titmouse—his representations as to the invaluable treasure that was about to be intrusted to him in the Lady Cecilia—the last direct representative of the most ancient noble family in the kingdom. Innumerable were his lordship's directions to him concerning his future conduct, both in public and private life: intimating, in a manner at once impressive and affectionate, that the eyes of the country would be thenceforward fixed upon him, as son-in-law of the Earl of Dreddlington. His lordship, moreover—pocketing the affront he had received at the hands of the Ministry—made a very strenuous and nearly a successful effort to procure for his destined son-in-law a vacant lordship of the Treasury. The Premier was really beginning to consider the subject, when Mr. O'Gibbet extinguished all the aspiring hopes of poor Lord Dreddlington, by applying for the vacant office for a friend of his, Mr. Och Hubbaboo, an early friend of Mr. O'Gibbet; and who, having failed in business, had come into the House of Commons to repair his shattered fortunes. I need hardly say that, within a day or so, Mr. Hubbaboo was made a lord of the Treasury; and thereby were very nearly alienated from Ministers two enlightened supporters—to wit, the Earl of Dreddlington and Mr. Titmouse.

Early in the forenoon of Tuesday the 1st of April, 18—, there were indications in the neighbourhood of Lord Dreddlington's house in Grosvenor Square, that an aristocratic wedding was about to be celebrated. Lady Cecilia's bridesmaids, and one or two other ladies, the Duke and Duchess of Tantallan, and a few others who were to accompany the party to church, made their appearance about eleven o'clock; and shortly afterwards dashed up Mr. Titmouse's cab, in which sat that gentleman, enveloped in a magnificent green cloak, which concealed the splendour of his personal appearance. He had been engaged at his toilet since five o'clock that morning, and the results were not unworthy of the pains which had been taken to secure them. He wore a light-blue body-coat, with velvet collar; tight black pantaloons tying round his ankles; gossamer white silk stockings, and dress-shoes with small gold buckles. His shirt was of snowy whiteness, and there glittered in the centre of it a very superb diamond brooch. He had two waistcoats, the under one a sky-blue satin (only the roll visible), the outer one a white satin waistcoat, richly embroidered. He wore a burnished gold guard-chain, disposed very gracefully over the outside of his outer waistcoat. His hair was parted down the middle, and curled forward towards each temple, giving his countenance a very bold and striking expression. He wore white kid gloves, a glossy new hat, and held in his hand his agate-headed ebony cane. Though he tried to look at his ease, his face was rather pale, and his manner a little flurried. As for the bride, she had slept scarcely a quarter of an hour the whole night; and a glimpse at her countenance, in the glass, convinced her of the necessity of yielding to Annette's suggestions, and rouging a little. Her eyes told of the sleepless and agitated night she had passed; and while dressing, she was twice forced to drink a little *sal volatile* and water. She was cold, and trembled. When at length she

had completed her toilet, what a figure did her cheval-glass present to her! The dress—rich white satin—a long and beautiful blonde lace veil—and a delicate wreath of orange blossoms, was that of a bride, certainly; but was the haggard countenance that of a bride? Miss Macspleuchan burst into tears at the sight. When, attended by her bridesmaids, and Miss Macspleuchan, she made her appearance in the drawing-room, the Earl of Dreddlinton approached her, and saluted her with silent tenderness. Then Titmouse came up, with a would-be familiar air—"Hope you're quite well, dearest, this happy day," said he, and kissed her gloved hand. She made him no reply; stepped back and sank upon the sofa; and presently the carriages were announced to be in readiness. The Earl led her down, followed by her two bridesmaids, and entered the first carriage, which then drove off to St. George's Church; Titmouse and the rest of the family immediately following. The ceremony was to be performed by the Bishop of Barnard-Castle, an old friend, and indeed a distant relation of Lord Dreddlinton's. Titmouse was pale and flushed by turns, and looked frightened—behaving, however, with more sedateness than I should have expected. Lady Cecilia leaned, when she could, against the rails; and repeated her few allotted words in a voice scarcely audible. When Titmouse affixed the ring upon her finger, she trembled and shed tears—averting her countenance from him, and at length concealing it entirely in her pocket-handkerchief. She looked indeed, the image of misery. The Earl of Dreddlinton maintained a countenance of rigid solemnity. At length the all-important ceremony came to a close; the necessary entries and signatures were made in the vestry, to which the wedding party followed the Bishop; and then Mr. Titmouse, taking his wife's arm within his own, led her from the vestry to the private door, where stood waiting for them the Earl's chariot. He handed her into it, and popped in after her—a little crowd standing round to catch a glimpse of the distinguished bride and bridegroom; and they drove rapidly homeward. He sat in one corner, and she in the other; each so occupied with their own thoughts that they uttered scarce two words all the way.

A splendid *déjeûner à la fourchette* was prepared, and a very brilliant party attended to pay their respects to the bride and bridegroom, and the Earl of Dreddlinton; and about two o'clock the Lady Cecilia withdrew to prepare for her journey, which was to Poppleton Hall, her father's residence in Hertfordshire, where they were to spend their honeymoon. She had never shown so much emotion in her life as when she parted with Miss Macspleuchan and her bridesmaids—being several times on the verge of hysterics. Mr. Titmouse's travelling chariot—a dashing chocolate-coloured one, with four horses—stood at the door, her ladyship's maid and his valet seated in the rumble. Some hundred people stood round to see the

"Happy, happy, happy pair"

set off on their journey of happiness. The Earl led down Lady Cecilia, followed by Titmouse, who had exchanged his hat for a gaudy travelling cap, with a gold band round it! Lady Cecilia with drooping head and feeble step, suffered the Earl, whom she kissed fervently, to place her in the chariot, when she burst into a flood of tears. Then Mr. Titmouse shook hands cordially with his distinguished father-in-law—popped into the chariot—the steps were doubled up—the door closed—the side-blinds were drawn down by Mr. Titmouse; "All's right!" cried one of the servants, and away rolled the carriage-and-four, which, quickening its speed, was soon out of sight. Lady Cecilia remained in a sort of stupor for some time, and sat silent and motionless in the corner of the chariot; but Titmouse had now become lively enough, having had the benefit of some dozen glasses of champagne.

"Ah, my lovely gal—dearest gal of my heart!" he exclaimed fondly, at the same time kissing her cold cheeks, and putting his arm round her waist—"Now you're all my own! 'Pon my soul, isn't it funny? We're man and wife! By Jove, I never loved you so much as now, ducky! eh?" Again he pressed his lips to her cold cheek.

"Don't, don't, I beg," said she faintly, "I'm not well;" and she feebly tried to disengage herself from his rude and boisterous embrace: while her drooping head and ashy cheek fully corroborated the truth of her statement. In this state she continued for the whole of the first stage. When they stopped to change horses, says Titmouse, starting up—having very nearly dropped asleep—"Cicely, as you're so uncommon ill, hadn't you better have your maid in, and I'll sit on the box?—It would be a devilish deal more comfortable for you—eh?"

"Oh, I should feel *so* obliged if you would, Mr. Titmouse!" she replied faintly. It was done as she wished. Titmouse enveloped himself in his cloak; and, having lit a cigar, mounted the box, and smoked all the way till they reached the Hall.

Gammon was one of those who had seen them set off on their auspicious journey. He contemplated them with deep interest and anxiety. "Well," he exclaimed, walking away with a deep sigh, when the carriage had got out of sight—"So far, *so good*: Heavens! the plot thickens, and the game is bold!"

They spent about a fortnight at Poppleton Hall, and then went on to Yatton; and if the reader be at all curious to know how Mr. and Lady Cecilia Titmouse commenced their matrimonial career, I am able, in some measure, to gratify him, by the sight of a letter addressed by the Lady Cecilia, some time afterwards, to one of her confidential friends.

"Yatton, 28th April, 18—.

"DEAR BLANCHE—

* * * "Fate should have something pleasant in store for me, since it has made me most unhappy now, but it is some consolation that I took this step purely to please my papa, who seemed to think it was a thing that *ought* to be done! You know he always fretted himself greatly about the division of the family interests, and so on; and when he proposed to me this truly unhappy alliance, I supposed it was my duty to comply, as indeed he said it was. I am sure but for this I should never have dreamed of such a thing as doing as I did, for if, by the way, fate chose us to come together, it ought surely to have fitted us to each other; but really, dear Blanche (*entre nous*), you cannot *think* what a *creature* it is. He is always smoking cigars, etc., and he by that means not only carries the nasty odour of the smoke about him everywhere, but also, in spite of all I can do, when we come together in the carriage (which is not often) and at meals, he communicates the odious smell to my clothes—and Annette wastes a fortune in eau-de-cologne to scatter over my dresses and her own too, and he has very nasty habits besides, namely picking his teeth (often at dinner), eating with his knife, etc., etc., and he is continually running his fingers through his horrid hair, to curl it, and carries a comb with him, and several times has combed his hair in the carriage just before we got out at the door of the place we were to dine at, and he always takes too *much* wine, and comes up the very last to the drawing-room, and sometimes in *such a state*. I am resolved I will never come home with him from dinner again, even if I ever go out together with him. I do believe the wretch has been guilty of some impudence to Annette, for the girl always colours when I mention his name, and looks confused and angry, but of course I cannot ask her. And he is such a *liar*; there is no believing a word he says, he is always saying that he might if he had chosen married Lady This and Lady That, and says Miss Aubrey was dying to have him (I wish dear B, she had instead of me, she

would have been welcome for me, to return and become mistress of Yatton again)—by the way it certainly is a truly delightful spot, quite old-fashioned and all that, and delightful grounds about it, but it seems like a nunnery to me, I am so unhappy and no one seems anxious to come to see me, though there are the —'s, and the —'s, and —'s, within an hour or two's drive of us, but how can you wonder? for if you only saw the sort of people that come here, such horrid wretches, a Unitarian parson and his vulgar wife and daughter, and a low apothecary and auctioneer and so on, which he says is necessary (forsooth) to keep up his interest in the borough. Then he goes on in such a shameful and unfeeling and disrespectful way before the vicar (Dr. Tatham, a very nice person, who I am sure, by his looks, *feels for me*) that Dr. T. will scarcely ever come near us under one pretence or another. I am sorry to tell you Mr. Titmouse has no more *sense of religion* than a cat or a dog, and I understand he has left a great many of his election bills unpaid (so that he is very unpopular), and positively, dear Blanche! the diamond spray the creature bought me turns out to be only *paste*!! He never goes to church, and has got up one or two dog-fights in the village, and he is hated by the tenants for he is always raising their rents. I forgot to mention by the way he had the monstrous assurance one morning to *open my letters*!—and said he had a right to do so, with his own wife, for we were one (I hate to write it), so I have had a letter-bag of my own which is always delivered in to my own room. Oh Heavens! the idea of his succeeding to the barony! but to be sure you have no notion how hard he lives; and (*entre nous* the other day the doctor was called in to him and had to put leeches on his head, and certainly, *entre nous*, dearest B., I understand such things sometimes do often lead to very *sad results*, but however he certainly seems better now.) My papa knows nothing of all this yet, but he soon must, and I am confident a *separation* must ensue, or I shall die, or go mad. Oh how thankful I should be! *** But I could fill two or three sheets more in this way, and yet I have not told you a hundredth part of his *gaucheries*, but really you must be quite sick of hearing of them. If he will but leave me here when he goes up to town, you will surely pay me your promised visit—and I will tell you many more miserable things. In the meanwhile, oh dearest B., how I envy you being single, and wish I were so again! *Be sure* you burn this when you have read it—and believe me, your unhappy,

“CECILIA.

“P.S.—Of course I shall not ask him for one of his ridiculous franks, I never do; and as your brother is not with you, you must not grumble at paying the postage of this long letter.

“THE LADY BLANCHE LEWISHAM.”

A dull and phlegmatic disposition, like that of Lady Cecilia, must have been roused and stung indeed, before she could have attained to such bitterness of expression as is occasionally to be met with in the above communication. Though it shadows forth, with painful distinctness, several of the more disadvantageous features of Mr. Titmouse's character and conduct, there were far darker ones, with which its miserable writer had not then become acquainted. I shall but hastily glance at one of them; viz., that he was at that moment keeping a mistress in town, and commencing the seduction of a farmer's daughter in the neighbourhood of Yatton! Execrable little miscreant!—why should I defile my paper by further specifying his gross misdeeds, or dwelling upon their sickening effects on the minds and feelings of the weak woman who could suffer herself to be betrayed into such a union?

Had Lady Cecilia been a woman of acute perceptions or lively sensibilities,

she must have fled from her sufferings—she must have gone mad, or committed suicide. As it was, dull as was her temperament, when the more odious points of Titmouse's character and habits were forced upon her notice by the close and constant contiguity of daily intercourse, the reflection that such must be the case *for the remainder of their lives*, became more intolerable, and roused feelings of active hatred and disgust; she became hourly more alive to the real horrors of her position. The slender stay, she had sought for in the reflection that she had incurred all by a dutiful submission to her father's wishes, quickly gave way; *she knew that it was false!* As for Titmouse, he had never cared one straw about anything beyond becoming the husband of the future Baroness of Drelincourt—and that on account not merely of the dignity and splendour conferred upon him by such an alliance with the last remaining member of the elder branch of his ancient family, but also because of the grave and repeated assurances of Mr. Gammon, that it was in some mysterious way essential to the tenure of his own position. Had, however, Lady Cecilia, instead of being cold and inanimate, haughty even to repulsion in her manner, and of person lean and uninviting—been of fascinating manners, affectionate disposition, of brilliant accomplishments, and of ripe loveliness of person, it would, I am persuaded, have made little or no difference to Mr. Titmouse; since such a radiant being would, as it were, stand always surrounded by the invisible but impassable barrier of *refinement*—for ever forbidding communion and sympathy. As for Lady Cecilia, Titmouse could scarcely avoid perceiving how she despised him, and avoided his company on every possible occasion. No person from merely seeing them, could have dreamed of their being husband and wife. He made no secret at all (at least in his own peculiar visiting circles) of his wishes that the Earl's increasing age and infirmities might quicken, and Lady Cecilia's apparently delicate health decline apace—and thus accelerate the accession of Mr. Titmouse to the barony of Drelincourt.

"Ha, ha!" would exclaim his choice boon companions, "won't it be comical, Tit, to see you take your seat in the Upper House?"

"Pon my soul, jolly, ah, ha!—Demme, I'll show the old stagers a funny trick or two!" "Capital!—ah, ha, ha!—Do the *donkey*? eh?—You'd make the Chancellor's wig jump off!" "Ha, ha, ha!—I'll tickle 'em, or my name isn't Tittlebat Titmouse!"—By all which was meant that he purposed introducing into the House of Lords that peculiar mode of debating which had earned him such quick distinction in the House of Commons!

After they had spent about a month at Yatton his urgent parliamentary duties required Mr. Titmouse to tear himself from that lovely seclusion—that "bower of bliss"—and resume his arduous post in the House. Though Lady Cecilia would have vastly preferred being left behind at Yatton, decency seemed to require that the bride and bridegroom should make their reappearance in the world jointly, and she was therefore compelled to accompany him to town; and they were very soon duly established in his new residence in Park Lane. It was spacious and elegant—indeed it was furnished with great splendour, inasmuch as *carte blanche* had been given to a fashionable upholsterer. In a moment they were both in the great whirling world of fashion. Lord Dreddlington gave a series of dinner parties on their account, as did several of their distinguished kinsfolk and friends; and in due time their hospitalities were returned by Mr. Titmouse. His first dinner party went off with great *éclat*, no fewer than four peers of the realm, with their ladies, being among his guests. Mr. Titmouse led down to dinner the gigantic Duchess of Tantallan, blazing in diamonds, his Grace the Duke bringing up the rear with the Lady Cecilia—and the splendid affair was duly announced, the ensuing morning, in the obsequious columns of the *Aurora*. For some little time Mr. Titmouse occupied his novel and dazzling position with an approach towards decorum and self-

denial; but, as he became familiar with it, his old tastes revived—and Lady Cecilia and her friends were gratified, for instance, while in the drawing-room after dinner by catching occasional sounds of Mr. Titmouse's celebrated imitations of animals, which once or twice, when considerably elevated, he insisted upon giving on his re-entering the drawingroom! Indeed, he spared no pains to acquire the power of pleasing society by the display of rare accomplishments; for which purpose he took lessons every other day in the *art diabolica*—i.e., in conjuring; in which he soon became an expert proficient, and could play marvellous tricks upon cards and with dice, eat pocket-handkerchiefs, cause wine-glasses visibly to sink through solid tables, and perform sundry other astounding feats. Nor was he long in collecting round him guests, who not only tolerated, but professed infinite delight in, such entertainments—"fit audience, *non* few"—consisting principally of those adventurous gentlemen who have entered Parliament in a devout reliance on Providence to find them dinners. 'Twas only in such society as this that Titmouse could feel the least sense of enjoyment, and from which Lady Cecilia altogether absented herself, often without deigning the slightest reason, excuse, or apology. In fact, the intemperate habits and irregular hours of Titmouse soon rendered it necessary that he and the Lady Cecilia should occupy separate sleeping apartments; for either his club, the House, or his other engagements, kept him out till a very late—or rather early—hour every morning.

It was about half-past eleven o'clock one day towards the latter end of June, that Mr. Titmouse, having finished breakfast (which was surely very early, since he had not got to bed till four o'clock that morning), a meal to which he invariably sat down alone, often not catching a glimpse of Lady Cecilia during the day, except on a chance encounter in the hall, or on the stairs, or when they were forced to go out to dinner together—had entered his library to enjoy undisturbed the luxury of his hookah. The library was a large and handsome room, all the sides of which were occupied by very curious antique carved bookcases, which had belonged to the former tasteful occupant of the house, and from whom they had been purchased by Titmouse, who then bethought himself of procuring a library to fill them. For this purpose, it luckily occurred to him, on seeing an advertisement of a library for sale by auction one day, that it would be a good speculation to be beforehand with the expected audience, and purchase the aforesaid library in a lump, by private contract. He did so—and at a remarkably low price; giving directions that they should forthwith be carried to a bookbinder, named by the obsequious auctioneer—with orders to bind them all in elegant but as varied bindings as possible. Certainly the works were of a somewhat miscellaneous character:—old Directories; Poems by Young Ladies, and Gentlemen; Ready-Reckoners; Doddridge's Expositor; Hints on Etiquette; two hundred Minerva press novels; triplicate copies of some twenty books on cookery; the art of war; charades; Cudworth's Intellectual System; books of travels; bibles, dictionaries, prayer-books, plays; Treatises on Political Economy, and Dancing; adventures of noted highwaymen; the classics; moral essays; and Burn's Ecclesiastical Law. If these respectable works had had the least sense of the distinction that had been so unexpectedly bestowed upon them, they ought not to have murmured at never afterwards receiving the slightest personal attention from their spirited and gifted proprietor!—The room was lit by a large bow-window, which, being partially open, admitted the pleasant breeze which was stirring without, while the strong light was mitigated by the half-drawn blinds, and the ample chintz window-draperies. On the mantel-piece stood one or two small alabaster statues and vases, and a very splendid and elaborately ornamented French timepiece. The only unpleasantness perceptible, was the sort of disagreeable odour prevalent in rooms which, as in the present instance, are

devoted to smoking. To this room had been also transferred many of the articles which I have described as having been visible in his rooms at the Albany. Over the mantel-piece was placed the picture of the boxers—that of Titmouse being similarly situated in the dining-room. Mr. Titmouse wore a full crimson dressing-gown, with yellow slippers; his shirt-collar was open and thrown down over his shoulders—leaving exposed to view a quantity of sand-coloured hair under his throat. In fact he looked the image of some impudent scamp of a valet, who has, in his master's absence, chosen to dress himself in that master's clothes, and affect his luxurious airs. He lay on the sofa with his hookah in his left hand; near him was the table, on which stood the *Morning Groul*, and some eight or ten letters, only one or two of which had as yet been opened. He had just leaned back his head, and with an air of tranquil enjoyment very slowly expelled a mouthful of smoke, when a servant submissively entered, and announced the arrival of a visitor—Mr. Gammon.

"How d'ye do, Gammon!—early, eh?" commenced Titmouse without stirring, and with infinite composure and *nonchalance*. Mr. Gammon made the usual reply, and presently sat down in the chair placed for him by the servant, nearly opposite to Titmouse—who, had he been accustomed to observation, or capable of it, might have detected something rather unusual in the flushed face, the anxious and restless eye, and the *forced* manner of his visitor.

"Likely to be devilish hot day—'pon my soul!"—exclaimed Titmouse, after again emptying his mouth—adding, in a tolerably conceited manner—"By the way—here's a letter from Snap—just opened it!—Rather cool, after what's passed—eh? Dem him, asks me for a place under government;—Ah—a—what's he fit for?"

"For what he *is*, and nothing else," replied Gammon with a bitter smile, glancing over poor Snap's letter, which Titmouse handed to him, though marked "strictly confidential"—Gammon being undoubtedly the very last man upon earth whom Snap would have wished to know of his application.

"Were you at the House last night?" inquired Gammon—"They sat very late! Lord Bulfinch made, I think, a very powerful speech—" "Yes—devilish good—rather long though; and too many of those cursed *figures* that—by Jove—no one cares about!" replied Titmouse, languidly.

He had by this time turned himself towards Mr. Gammon;—his right arm and leg hanging carelessly over the further side of the sofa.

"Lady Cecilia is well, I hope?" "Can't say—not seen her this week," drawled Titmouse. "I'll ring and ask, if you wish," he added with an affected smile. "Ah, my dear Titmouse," quoth Gammon blandly, and with a smile of delicious flattery, "I hope you don't give her ladyship just cause for *jealousy*?—Eh? You must not avail yourself of your—your acknowledged power over the sex—ahem!" Mr. Titmouse, half closing his eyes, silently expelled a mouthful of smoke, while an ineffable smile stole over his features. "You must not neglect her ladyship, Titmouse," quoth Gammon, gently shaking his head, and with an anxiously deferential air. "'Pon my life, I don't neglect her!—Public life, you know—eh?" replied Titmouse slowly, with his eyes closed, and speaking with an air of one suffering from *ennui*. Here a pause of some moments ensued.

"Can we have about half-an-hour to ourselves, uninterruptedly?" at length inquired Mr. Gammon. "Ah—a—why—my singing-master is coming here a little after twelve," quoth Titmouse, turning himself round, so as to be able to look at the clock on the mantel-piece.

"Oh, probably less than that period will suffice, if we shall not be interrupted—may I ring the bell, and will you give orders to that effect?" With this, Gammon rung the bell; and on the servant's appearing:—"I say, sir—do you

hear, demme?" said Titmouse, "not at home—till this gentleman's gone." The man bowed, and withdrew; and on his closing the door, Gammon softly stepped after him and bolted it; by which time Titmouse, somewhat startled, withdrew his hookah, for an instant, from his mouth, and gazed rather anxiously at Gammon, about whose appearance he then, for the first time, fancied he saw something unusual.

"Ah, ha!—My stars, Mr. Gammon, we're going to be *devilish* secret—aren't we!" exclaimed Titmouse with a faint smile, having watched Mr. Gammon's movement with great surprise; and he began to smoke rather more energetically than before, with his eye fixed on the grave countenance of Mr. Gammon.

"My dear Titmouse," commenced his visitor, drawing his chair near to Titmouse, and speaking in an earnest and kindly manner, "does it never astonish you, when you reflect on the stroke of fortune which has elevated you to your present point of splendour and distinction?" "Most amazing!—uncommon!" replied Titmouse apprehensively. "It *is*!—marvellous! unprecedented! You are the envy of hundreds upon hundreds of thousands! Such an affair as yours does not happen above once or twice in a couple of centuries—if so often! You cannot imagine the feelings of delight with which I regard all this—this brilliant result of my long labours, and untiring devotion to your service."—He paused. "Oh, 'pon my life, yes; it's all very true," replied Titmouse with a little trepidation, replenishing the bowl of his hookah with tobacco. "May I venture to hope, my dear Titmouse, that I have established my claim to be considered, in some measure, as the sole architect of your extraordinary fortunes—your earliest—your most constant friend?" "You see, as I've often said, Mr. Gammon—I'm most uncommon obliged to you for all favours—so help me—! and no mistake," said Titmouse, with a countenance of increasing seriousness; and he rose from his recumbent posture, and, still smoking, sat with his face turned full towards Mr. Gammon, who resumed—"As I am not in the habit, my dear Titmouse, of beating about the bush, let me express a hope that you consider the services I have rendered you not unworthy of requital."—"Oh yes—to be sure—certainly," quoth Titmouse, slightly changing colour—"anything, by Jove, that's in my power—but, it is most particular unfortunate that—ahem!—so deuced hard up just now—but—ah, 'pon my soul, I'll speak to Lord Bulfinch, or some of those people, and get you something—though I sha'n't do anything of the kind for *Snap*—dem him! You've no idea," continued Titmouse anxiously, "how devilish thick Lord Bulfinch and I are—he shakes hands with me when we meet in the lobby—he does, 'pon my life." "I am very much obliged, my dear Titmouse, for your kind offer—but I have a *little* political influence myself, when I think fit to exert it," replied Gammon gravely. "Well, then," interrupted Titmouse—"as for money, if that's what—by jingo! but if *you* don't know how *precious* hard up one is just now—"

"My dear sir, replied Gammon, with a countenance sensibly darkening as he went on, "the subject on which we are now engaged is one of inexpressible interest and importance, in my opinion, to each of us! and let us discuss it calmly. I am prepared to make a communication to you immediately, which you will never forget to the day of your death. Are you prepared to receive it?"

"Oh yes!—Never so wide awake in my life! oh Lord! fire away!"—replied Titmouse; and taking the tip of his hookah from his lips, and holding it in the fingers of his left hand, he leaned forward, staring open-mouthed at Gammon.

"Well, my dear Titmouse, then I will proceed. I will not enjoin you to secrecy; and that not merely because I have full confidence in your honour—

but because you cannot disclose it to any mortal man but at the peril of immediate and utter ruin."

"'Pon my soul, most amazing! Demme, Mr. Gammon, you frighten me out of my wits!" said Titmouse, turning paler and paler, as his recollection became more and more distinct of certain mysterious hints of Mr. Gammon's, many months before, at Yatton, as to his power over Titmouse.

"Consider for a moment. You are now a member of Parliament; the unquestioned owner of a fine estate; the husband of a lady of very high rank—the last direct representative of one of the proudest and most ancient of the noble families of Great Britain; you yourself are next but one in succession to almost the oldest barony in the kingdom: in fact, in all human probability you are the next Lord Drelincourt; and all this through ME." He paused.

"Well—excuse me, Mr. Gammon—but I hear;—though—ahem! you're (meaning no offence) I can't for the life and soul of me tell what the devil it is you're driving at"—said Titmouse, twisting his finger into his hair, and gazing at Gammon with intense anxiety. For some moments Mr. Gammon remained looking very solemnly and in silence at Titmouse; and then proceeded.

"Yet you are *really* no more entitled to *be* what you seem—what you are thought—or to possess what you at present possess—than the little wretch that last swept your chimneys here.

The hookah dropped out of Titmouse's hand upon the floor, and he made no effort to pick it up, but sat staring at Gammon, with cheeks almost as white as his shirt-collar, and in blank dismay.

"I perceive that you are agitated, Mr. Titmouse," said Gammon kindly. "By Jove—I should think so!" replied Titmouse faintly; but he tried to assume an incredulous smile—in vain, however; and to such a pitch had his agitation reached, that he rose, opened a cabinet near him, and taking out from it a brandy-flask and a wine-glass, poured it out full, and drank it off. "You a'n't *joking*, Mr. Gammon, eh?" Again he attempted a sickly smile. "God forbid, Mr. Titmouse!" "Well—but," faltered Titmouse, "*why* a'n't I entitled to it all! Hasn't the law given it to me? And can't the law do as it likes?" "No one on earth knows the *what* and the *why* of this matter but myself; and, if you choose, no one ever shall; nay, I will take care, if you come this morning to my terms, to deprive even myself of all means of proving what I can *now* prove, at any moment I choose."—"Lord, Mr. Gammon!" ejaculated Titmouse, passing his hand hastily over his damp forehead—his agitation visibly increasing. "What's to be the figure?" he faltered presently, and looked as if he dreaded to hear the answer. "If you mean, what are my *terms*—I will at once tell you:—they are terms on which I shall peremptorily insist; they have been long fixed in my own mind; I am quite inflexible; so help me Heaven, I will not vary from them a hair's-breadth! I require first to sit in Parliament for Yatton, at the next election; and afterwards alternately with yourself; and secondly, That you would immediately grant me an annuity for my life of two thousand pounds a-year on your——"

Titmouse sprang from the sofa, dashing his fist on the table, and uttering a frightful imprecation. He stood for a moment, and then threw himself desperately at full length on the sofa, muttering the same execration that had first issued from his lips. Gammon moved not a muscle, but fixed a steadfast eye on Titmouse: the two might have been compared to the affrighted rabbit, and the deadly boa-constrictor.

"It's all a swindle!—a d——d swindle!" at length he exclaimed, starting up into a sitting posture, and almost grinning defiance at Gammon. "You're a swindler!"—he exclaimed vehemently. "Possibly—but *you*, sir, are a bastard"—replied Gammon calmly. Titmouse looked the picture of horror, and trembled in every limb. "It's a lie!—It's all a lie!"—he gasped.

"Sir, you are a *bastard*"—repeated Gammon bitterly, and extending his forefinger threateningly towards Titmouse. Then he added with sudden vehemence—"Wretched miscreant—do you presume to tell me I lie? You base-born cur!"—a lightning glance shot from his eye; but he restrained himself. Titmouse sat at length as if petrified, while Gammon in a low tone, and with fearful bitterness of manner, proceeded—"You, the owner of Yatton? You, the next Lord Drelincourt? No more than the helper in your stables! One breath of mine blights you for ever—as an impostor—a mere audacious swindler—to be spit upon! to be kicked out of society—perhaps to be transported for life. Gracious Heavens! what will the Earl of Dreddlington say when he hears that his sole daughter and heiress is married to a—— It will kill *him*, or he will kill *you*."

"Two can play at that," whispered Titmouse faintly—indeed almost inarticulately. There was nearly a minute's pause.

"No—but *is* it all true?—honour!" inquired Titmouse in a very subdued voice. "As God is my witness!" replied Gammon. "Well," exclaimed Titmouse, after a prodigious sigh, "then, at any rate, you're in for it with me; you said just now you'd done it all. Ah, ha! I recollect, Mr. Gammon! I should no more have thought of it *myself*—Lord! than—what d'ye say to *that*, Mr. Gammon?" "Alas, sir! it will not avail you," replied Gammon with a fearful smile; "for I never made the dreadful discovery of your illegitimacy till it was too late—till at least two months after I had put you (whom I believed the true heir) into possession of Yatton!" "Ah—I don't know—but—why didn't you tell Lord Dreddlington? Why did you let me marry Lady Cicely? By Jove, but it's *you* he'll kill," quoth Titmouse eagerly. "Yes!—Alas! I ought to have done so," replied Mr. Gammon with a profound sigh—adding, abstractedly, "It may not be too late to make his lordship *some* amends. I may save his *title* from degradation. Lord Drelincourt——" "Oh Lord!" ejaculated Titmouse involuntarily and almost unconsciously, staring stupidly at Gammon, who continued, with a renewed sigh—"Yes, I *ought* to have told his lordship—but I own—I was led away by feelings of pity—of affection for you—and, alas! is this the return?" He spoke this with a look and in a tone of sorrowful reproach.

"Well, you shouldn't have come down on one so suddenly—all at once—how can a man—eh? Such *horrid* news!" "It has cost me, sir, infinitely greater pain to tell you, than it has cost you to hear it!" "By the living Jove!" exclaimed Titmouse, starting up with a sort of recklessness, and pouring out and tossing off a large glassful of brandy—"it *can't* be true—it's all a dream, I—I a'n't—I *can't* be a bas——perhaps *you're* all this while the true heir, Mr. Gammon?" he added briskly, and snapped his fingers at his companion.

"No, sir, I am not," replied Gammon calmly; "but let me tell you, *I know where he is to be found*, Mr. Titmouse! Do you commission me to go in search of him?" he inquired, suddenly fixing his bright penetrating eye upon Titmouse, who instantly stammered out—"Oh Lord! By Jove! no, no!"

Gammon could scarcely suppress a bitter smile, so ludicrous were the looks and tone of Titmouse.

"You shouldn't have let me spend such a lot of money, if it wasn't mine all the while——" "The estate was, in a manner, Mr. Titmouse, in my *gift*; and in pitching upon you, sir, out of several, I had imagined that I had chosen a gentleman—a man grateful and honourable——" "'Pon my solemn soul, so I *am*!" interrupted Titmouse eagerly. "I had but to scrawl a line or two with my pen, the very first day that I saw you at the shop of Mr. Tag-rag—and there, sir—or in some similar hole—you would have been at this moment!" replied Gammon with a sudden sternness that quite overawed Titmouse, but totally losing sight of the very different account of the matter which he had

given Titmouse five minutes before; but the very best and most experienced liars have short memories. Here it was, however, *Liar v. Fool*; and the latter did not perceive the slip made by his adversary—who, however, suddenly became aware of his little inconsistency, and coloured.

"You'll excuse me, sir," quoth Titmouse presently; and with an air which was becoming momentarily more timid and doubtful—"but *will* you, if all this isn't a bottle of smoke, tell me how you can *prove* it all? Because, you know, it isn't only *saying* the thing that will do—you know, Mr. Gammon?"

"Certainly—certainly! You are quite right, Mr. Titmouse! Nothing can be more reasonable! Your curiosity shall be gratified. Aware that your natural acuteness, my dear sir, would in all probability prompt you to make the very observation you have now made, I have provided myself with the two principal documents, and you shall see them; though I doubt whether you will at first sight understand them, or appreciate their importance; but, if you desire it, I will fully explain them to you."

With this he produced his pocket-book, and took out carefully two small pieces of paper, folded up, which, after a very brief preliminary explanation which made Titmouse tremble from head to foot, and no longer disbelieve the representations of Gammon, he unfolded and read—Titmouse looking affrightedly over his shoulder.

"Do I know the handwriting?" he inquired faintly. "Probably not," replied Gammon. "It's a devilish queer sort of writing, and precious little of it——" "It *is*, and when you consider——" "Are both in the same handwriting?" inquired Titmouse, taking them into his tremulous hand; while Gammon observed that his countenance indicated the despair which had taken possession of him.

"That cursed curtain is so much in the light," said Titmouse, looking up; and going towards it, as if to draw it aside, he started suddenly away from Gammon, and with frenzied gestures tore the little papers to pieces with inconceivable rapidity, and flung them out of the window, where a brisk breeze instantly took them up, and scattered them abroad—the glistening fragments—never to be again united.

Having performed this astounding feat, he instantly turned round, and leaning his back against the window, gazed at Gammon with a deperate air of mingled apprehension and triumph, but spoke not a word. Nor did Gammon; but—oh the look with which he regarded Titmouse as he slowly approached towards him! who stepping aside, as Gammon advanced, reached the cabinet, and with desperate rapidity threw open the door, and, as if the devil had been waiting his bidding, in a moment turned round upon Gammon with a pistol.

"So help me God, I'll fire!" gasped Titmouse, cocking and presenting it—"I will—I *will*—*One!*—*Two!*—For God's sake! be off!—It's loaded, and no mistake!—If I say *Th*—I'll fire, if I'm hanged for it!" "Booby! You may put your pistol down, sir!" said Gammon calmly and resolutely, a contemptuous smile passing over his pale features. "Demme!—distance!—Keep your distance!" cried Titmouse, his voice quivering with agitation.

"Ridiculous simpleton!—You poor rogue!" said Gammon, laughingly. There was, however, *murder* in his smile; and Titmouse instinctively perceived it. He kept his deadly weapon pointed full at Gammon's breast, but his hand trembled violently. 'Twas wonderful that some chance motion of the shaking finger of Titmouse did not send a bullet through Mr. Gammon's heart.

He stood, for a minute or two, gazing steadfastly, and without moving, at Titmouse; and then, shrugging his shoulders, with a bitter smile returned to his chair, and resumed his seat. Titmouse, however, refused to follow his example.

"So help me God, sir! I will not hurt a hair of your head," said Gammon earnestly. Still Titmouse remained at the window, pistol in hand. "Why

should I hurt you? What have you to fear, you little idiot!" inquired Gammon impatiently. "Do you, then, really think you have injured me? Do you positively think me so great a fool, my little friend, as really to have trusted you with the precious originals, of which those were only the copies! Copies which I can replace in a minute or two's time? The originals, believe me, are far away, and safe enough under lock and key!"

"I—I—I don't believe you," gasped Titmouse, dropping the hand that held the pistol, and speaking in a truly dismal tone.

"That does not signify, my worthy little friend," said Gammon, with an infernal smile, "if the *fact* be so. That you are a fool, you must by this time even yourself begin to suspect; and you *can't* doubt that you are an arrant little rogue, after what has just taken place? Eh? 'Twas a bright idea truly—well conceived and boldly executed. I give you all the credit for it; and it is only your misfortune. So let us now return to business. Uncock your pistol—replace it in your cabinet, or in one minute's time I leave you, and go direct to Lord Dreddlington; and if so, you had better use that pistol in blowing out your *own* brains—if you have any."

Titmouse, after a moment or two's pause of irresolution, passively obeyed—very nearly on the point of crying aloud with disappointment and impotent rage; and he and Gammon were presently again sitting opposite to one another.

Gammon was cold and collected—yet must it not have cost him a prodigious effort? Though he had told Titmouse that they were *copies* only which he had destroyed, they were, nevertheless, the ORIGINALS, which, with such an incredible indiscretion, he had trusted into the hands of Titmouse; they were the ORIGINALS which Titmouse had just scattered to the winds; and who in so doing had suddenly broken to pieces the wand of the enchanter who had long exercised over him so mysterious and despotic an authority! In the present instance, the only satisfactory way of accounting for Mr. Gammon's indiscretion would seem to be by referring it to a sense of security engendered by his profound contempt for Titmouse.

"Are you *now* satisfied, Mr. Titmouse, that you are completely at my mercy, and at the same time totally undeserving of it?" said Gammon, speaking in a low and earnest tone, and with much of his former kindness of manner. To an observant eye, however, what was at that moment the real expression in that of Gammon? Soothing and gentle as was his voice, he felt as if he could instantly have destroyed the audacious little miscreant before him. But he proceeded with wonderful self-command—"Do not, my dear Titmouse, madly make me your enemy—your enemy for life—but rather your friend—your watchful and powerful friend, whose every interest is identified with your own. Remember all that I have done and sacrificed for you—how I have racked my brain for you day and night—always relying upon your ultimate gratitude. Oh, the endless scheming I have had to practise, to conceal your fatal secret—and of which you shall ere long know more! During these last two years have I not ruinously neglected my own interest to look after yours?" Gammon paused, and abruptly added—"I have but to lift my finger, and this splendid dressing-gown of yours, Titmouse, is exchanged for a prison-jacket—"

"Oh Lord! oh Lord! oh Lord!" suddenly exclaimed Titmouse with a shudder—"I wish I were dead and forgotten! oh Lord! what shall I do? 'Pon my *soul*!"—he struck his forehead with some violence—"I'm going mad—"

"Consider, Mr. Titmouse, calmly, how reasonable and moderate is my offer"—proceeded Gammon; who now and then, however, experienced changes of colour, on the sudden recurrence of a sense of his last misfortune.

"Here's Lady Cicely to have £3,000 a-year," passionately interposed Titmouse. "Not till after your death, my dear sir——" "Then she shall have it directly; for curse me if I don't kill myself——!" "Then she would never have a farthing—for I should instantly produce the real heir——" "Yah!" exclaimed Titmouse, uttering a sound like the sharp, furious bark of a cur, foiled at all points. He threw himself on the sofa, and folded his arms on his breast, compressing them as it were with convulsive vehemence.

"Do not excite yourself, Mr. Titmouse—you are still one of the most fortunate men upon earth, to have fallen into hands like mine, I can assure you! You will still enjoy a truly splendid income—little short of nine thousand a-year—for I will undertake to raise the Yatton rental, within a year or two, to twelve or thirteen thousand a-year, as I have often told you—I have explained to you over and over again, how absurdly under their value they were let in the time of——"

"And you've perhaps forgotten that I've borrowed nearly fifty thousand pounds—that costs nothing, I suppose!" "Well, certainly, you must be a little careful for a year or two, that's all——" "Demme, sir!—I must give up my *yacht*!" exclaimed Titmouse, desperately snapping his thumb and finger vehemently at Gammon. "Yes—or Yatton," replied Gammon sternly. "After all—what more shall I be than a sort of steward of yours?"

"I don't want one," interrupted Titmouse; and, starting from the sofa, walked to the window, where he stood with his back towards Gammon, and crying! Gammon eyed him for several minutes in silence; and then slowly approaching him, tapped him briskly on the shoulder. Titmouse started. "Come, sir—you have now, I hope, relieved your little feelings, and must attend to me—and be prompt, too, sir! The time for trifling, and playing the baby, or the girl, is gone. Hark you, sir!—yield me my terms, or this very day I spring a mine under your feet, you little villain! that shall blow you into ten thousand atoms, and scatter them wider than ever you scattered just now those bits of worthless paper! Do you hear that?" As he said this, he took hold of the collar of Titmouse's dressing-gown, which Titmouse felt to be grasped by a hand, tightening momentarily, with vehement emotion. Titmouse made no reply; but gazed at Gammon with a countenance full of distress and terror.

"Pause," continued Gammon, in a low vehement tone and manner, "and you are lost—stripped of this gaudy dress—turned out of this splendid house into the streets, or a prison!—If I quit this room—and I will not wait much longer—without your plain and written consent to my terms, I shall go direct to my Lord Dreddlinton, and tell him the obscure and base-born impostor that has crept——"

"Oh, Mr. Gammon—Mr. Gammon! have mercy on me!" exclaimed Titmouse, shaking like an aspen-leaf—at length realizing the terrible extent of danger impending over him. "Have mercy on yourself!" rejoined Gammon sternly. "I will!—I'll do all you ask—I will, so help me——!" "I'm glad to hear it!" said Gammon, relaxing his hold of Titmouse; and, in a voice of returning kindness, adding—"Oh, Titmouse, Titmouse! how fearful would be the scene—when your noble father-in-law—alas! you must have quitted the country! His lordship would have instantly divorced you from the Lady Cecilia!"

"You can't think how I love Lady Cicely!" exclaimed Titmouse in a broken voice. "Ay—but would she love *you*, if she knew who and what you were?" "Oh, Lord! oh Lord! I love Lady Cicely! I love Lady Cicely!" "Then get pen, ink, and paper, if you would not lose her for ever!"

"Here they are, Mr. Gammon!" exclaimed Titmouse, hastily stepping to his desk which lay on the table; and with tremulous eagerness he got out a quire

of writing paper and took a pen. "Suppose *you* write, Mr. Gammon," said he suddenly—"my hand trembles so! Lord, I feel so sick, I'll sign anything you like!"

"Perhaps it would be better," replied Gammon, sitting down, and dipping his pen into the inkstand; "it will save time." He commenced writing; and, as he went on, said at intervals—"Yes, Titmouse! Thank God all is now over! It shall no longer be in Lord Dreddlinton's power—no, nor any one's—to beggar you—to transport you—to take your noble wife from you——"

"Oh, no, no! You know Lady Cicely's taken me for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer!" interrupted Titmouse, in a sort of agony of apprehension. "Ah, Titmouse! But she did not know, when she said that, that she was speaking to a——" "What! wouldn't it have held good?" exclaimed Titmouse, perfectly aghast. "We need not speculate on a case that cannot arise, my dear Titmouse," replied Gammon, eyeing him steadfastly, and then resuming his writing. "This paper becomes, as they say at sea, your sheet-anchor! Here you shall remain—the owner of Yatton—of this splendid house—husband of Lady Cecilia—a member of Parliament—and in due time, as 'my Lord Drelincourt,' take your place permanently in the Upper House of Parliament, amongst the hereditary legislators of your country. Now, Mr. Titmouse, sign your name, and there's an end for ever of all your unhappiness!"

Titmouse eagerly took the pen, and, with a very trembling hand, affixed his signature to what Gammon had written. "You'll sign it too, eh?" he inquired timidly. "Certainly, my dear Titmouse."—Gammon affixed his signature, after a moment's consideration.—"Now we are both bound—we are friends for life! Let us shake hands, my dear, dear Titmouse, to bind the bargain!"

They did so, Gammon cordially taking into his hands each hand of Titmouse, who, in his anxiety and excitement, never once thought of asking Mr. Gammon to allow him to read over what he had signed.

"Oh Lord!" he exclaimed, heaving a very deep sigh, "it seems as if we'd been only in a dream! I begin to feel *something like* again!—It's really all right?" "On my sacred word of honour," replied Gammon, laying his hand on his heart, "provided you perform the engagement into which you have this day entered." "Never fear! honour bright!" said Titmouse, placing *his* on his heart, with as solemn a look as he could assume.

Mr. Gammon, having folded up his paper, put it into his pocket-book. "I was a trifle too deep for you, Titmouse, eh?" said he good-humouredly. "How could you suppose me green enough to bring you the *real* documents?" he added, with perfect command of voice and feature. "Where are they?" inquired Titmouse timidly. "At a banker's, in a double-iron strong-box, with three different locks." "Lord!—But, *in course*, you'll put them into the fire when I've performed my agreement, eh?"

Gammon looked at him for a moment, doubtful what answer to make to this unexpected question.

"My dear Titmouse," said he at length, "I will be candid—I must preserve them—but no human eye shall ever see them except my own." "My stars!—Excuse me"—stammered Titmouse uneasily. "Never fear *my* honour, Titmouse! Have you ever had reason to do so?" "No—never! It's quite true! And why don't you trust *me*?" "Have you forgotten? *Did* I not trust you—as *you supposed*?"—quickly subjoined Gammon, positively on the point of again committing himself—"and when you fancied you really had in your power the precious documents?" "Oh! well"—said Titmouse, his face flushing all over—"but that's all past and gone." "You *must* rely on my honour—and I'll tell you why. What would be easier than for me to pretend to you that the papers which you might see me burn, were really the originals—and yet be no such thing?"

"In course—yes; I see!" replied Titmouse—who, however, had really not comprehended the case which Gammon had put to him. "Well—but—I say—excuse me, Mr. Gammon"—said Titmouse, hesitatingly returning, as Gammon imagined, to the charge—"but—you said something about the *real* heir." "Certainly. There *is* such a person, I assure you!" "Well—but since you and I, you know, have made it up, and are friends for life—eh? What's to be done with the fellow? (betwixt ourselves!)"

"That is at present no concern—nay, it never will be any concern of yours or mine. Surely it is enough for you, that you are enjoying the rank and fortune belonging to some one else? Good gracious! I can't help reminding you—fancy the natural son of a cobbler figuring away as the Right Honourable Lord Drelincourt—while all the while, the real Lord Drelincourt is—nay, at this moment, pining, poor soul! in poverty and obscurity."

"Well—I dare say he's used to it, so it can't hurt him much! But I've been thinking, Mr. Gammon, couldn't we get him—pressed? or enlisted into the army?—He's a deuced deal better out of the way, you know, for both of us!"

"Sir!" interrupted Gammon, speaking very seriously, and even with a melancholy and apprehensive air—"leave the future to *me*. I have made all requisite arrangements, and am myself implicated already to a most awful extent on your behalf; the only person on earth beside myself that can disturb my arrangements is yourself."

Here a gentle tapping was heard at the door.

"Be off!" shouted Titmouse, with angry impatience; but Mr. Gammon, who was anxious himself to be gone, stepped to the door, and opening it, a servant entered—a tall, graceful footman with powdered hair, shoulder-knot, and blue and yellow livery—and who obsequiously intimated to Mr. Titmouse that Signor Sol-fa had been in attendance for at least half-an-hour.

"A—a—I don't sing to-day—let him come to-morrow," said Titmouse, and the servant withdrew.

"Farewell, Mr. Titmouse—I have a most important engagement awaiting me at the office—so I must take my leave. Will you execute the necessary documents as soon as they are ready? I will cause them to be prepared immediately."

"Oh! yes"—and he added in a lower tone—"take care, Mr. Gammon, that no one knows *why*!—eh, you know?"

"Leave that to *me*!—Good morning, Mr. Titmouse," replied Gammon, buttoning his surtout, and taking up his gloves and hat; and having shaken Titmouse by the hand, he was the next moment in the street—where he heaved a prodigious sigh—which, however, only momentarily relieved his pent-up bosom from the long-suppressed rage, the mortification, the wounded pride, and the wild apprehension with which it was nearly bursting. Why, what a sudden and dismaying disaster had befallen him! And what but his own inconceivable folly had occasioned it? His own puppet had beaten him; had laid him prostrate: 'twas as though Prospero had permitted Caliban to wheedle him out of his wand! What could Gammon possibly have been thinking about, when he trusted the originals into the hands of Titmouse? After a while, he reflected that regrets were idle—the future, not the past, was to be considered; and how he had to deal with the new state of things which had so suddenly been brought about. All he had thenceforth to trust to, was his mastery over the fears of a fool. But was he *really*, on consideration, in a worse position than before? Had Titmouse turned restive at any time while Gammon possessed the documents in question, could Gammon have had more effectual control over him than he still had, while he had succeeded in persuading Titmouse that such documents were still in existence? Could the legality of the transaction

which Gammon sought to effect, be upheld one whit the more in the one case than in the other, if Titmouse took it into his head resolutely to resist? Again, could an arrangement of such magnitude, could so serious a diminution of Titmouse's income, remain long concealed from his father-in-law, Lord Dreddlington, who, Gammon knew, was every now and then indicating much anxiety on the subject of Titmouse's finances? Was it possible to suppose the Earl disposed to acquiesce, in any event, in such an arrangement? Suppose again Titmouse, in some moment of caprice, or under the influence of wine, should disclose to the Earl the arrangement which would have taken place; and that, either sinking, or revealing, the true ground on which Mr. Gammon rested a claim of such magnitude? Gracious Heavens! thought Gammon—fancy the Earl really made acquainted with the true state of the case! What effect would so terrible a disclosure produce upon him.

Here a bold stroke occurred to Mr. Gammon: what if he were himself, as it were, to take the bull by its horns—to be beforehand with Titmouse, and apprise the Earl of the frightful calamity that had befallen him and his daughter? Gammon's whole frame vibrated with the bare imagining of the scene which would probably ensue. But what would be the practical use to be made of it? The first shock over, if the old man, indeed, survived it—would not the possession of such a secret give Gammon a complete hold upon the Earl, and render him in effect obedient to his wishes?

CHAPTER XXX.

THE objects which Gammon had originally proposed to himself, and unwaveringly fixed his eye upon amidst all the mazy tortuosities of his course, since taking up the cause of Tittlebat Titmouse, was his own permanent establishment in the upper sphere of society; above all conscious that could he but once emerge into political life his energies would ensure him speedy distinction. With an independent income of £2,000 a-year, he felt that he should be standing on sure ground. But even above and beyond these, there was one dazzling object of his hopes and wishes, which unattained, would render all others comparatively valueless—a union with Miss Aubrey. His heart fluttered within him at the bare notion of such an event. What effect would be produced upon that beautiful, that pure, high-minded, but haughty creature—for haughty to *him* had Kate Aubrey ever appeared—by a knowledge that he, Gammon, possessed the means—Bah! accursed Titmouse!—thought Gammon, his cheek suddenly blanching as he recollected that through him *those means* no longer existed.—Stay!—Unless, indeed—* * *—which would, however, be all but impossible—perilous in the extreme! Absorbed with these reflections, he started on being accosted by the footman of the Earl of Dreddlington; who, observing Gammon, had ordered his carriage to draw up, to enable his lordship to speak to him. It was the end of Oxford Street nearest to the City.

"Sir—Mr. Gammon—good-day, sir!"—commenced the Earl, with a slight appearance of disappointment, and even displeasure; "pray, has anything unfortunate happened?" "Unfortunate! I beg your lordship's pardon—" interrupted Gammon, colouring visibly, and gazing with surprise at the Earl. "You do not *generally*, Mr. Gammon, forget your appointments. The Marquis, I, and the gentlemen of the Direction, have been waiting for you in vain at the office for a whole hour." "Good Heavens! my lord—I am confounded!" said Gammon, suddenly recollecting the engagement he had made with the Earl: "I have forgotten everything in a sudden fit of indisposition, with which

I have been seized at the house of a client at Bayswater. I can but apologize, my lord——”

“Sir, say no more; your looks are more than sufficient; and I beg that you will do me the honour to accept a seat in my carriage, and tell me whither you will be driven. I’m at your service, Mr. Gammon, for at least an hour; longer than that I cannot say, as I have to be at the House; you remember our two bills have to be forwarded a stage——”

Since his lordship was as peremptory as politeness would permit him to be, in got Gammon, and named the Gunpowder and Freshwater Company’s Offices, in Lothbury, in the hopes of finding yet some of the gentlemen, whom he had so sadly disappointed; and thither, having turned his horses’ heads, drove the coachman.

“Sir,” said the Earl, after much inquiry into the nature of Gammon’s recent indisposition, “by the way, what can be the meaning of my Lord Tadpole’s opposition to the second reading of our bill, No. 2?”

“We offered his lordship no shares, my lord—that is the secret. I saw him a few days ago, and he sounded me upon the subject; but—I’m sure your lordship will understand—in a company such as ours, my lord——”

“Sir, I quite comprehend you, and I applaud your vigilant discrimination. Sir, in affairs of this description, in order to *secure* the confidence of the public, it is a matter of the last importance that none but men of the highest—by the way, Mr. Gammon, how are the Golden Egg shares? Would you advise me to sell——”

“Hold, my lord, a little longer. We are going, in a few days’ time, to publish some important information concerning the prospects of the undertaking, of the most brilliant character, and which cannot fail to raise the value of the shares, and *then* will be the time to sell! Has your lordship signed the deed yet?”

“Sir, I signed it last Saturday, in company with my Lord Marmalade. I should not like to part with my interest in the company, you see—Mr. Gammon—hastily; but I am in your hands——” “My lord, I am ever watchful of your lordship’s interests.” “By the way, will you dine with me to-morrow? We shall be quite alone, and I am very anxious to obtain an accurate account of the present state of Mr. Titmouse’s property; for, to tell you the truth, I have heard of one or two little matters that occasion me some uneasiness——”

“Can anything be more unfortunate, my lord? I am engaged out to dinner for the next few days—if indeed I shall be well enough to go to any of them,” said Gammon with an agitation which could have escaped the observation of few persons except the Earl of Dreddlington.

“Sir—I exceedingly regret to hear it: let me trust that some day next week I shall be more fortunate. There are several matters on which I am desirous of consulting you. When did you last see Mr. Titmouse?”

“Let me see, my lord—I—don’t think I’ve seen him since Monday last, when I casually met him in one of the committee-rooms of the House of Commons, where, by the way, he seems a pretty frequent attendant——”

“I’m glad to hear it,” replied the Earl, somewhat gravely; and, as Gammon imagined, with a slight expression of surprise, or even distrust. Gammon therefore fancied that the Earl had received recent intelligence of some of the wild pranks of his hopeful son-in-law, and wished to make inquiries concerning them of Gammon.

“Will you, sir,—by the way—have the goodness to write off to-day to General Epaulette’s solicitors, and tell them I wish to pay off immediately £12,000 of his mortgage? Oblige me, sir, by attending to this matter to-day; for I met the General the other day at dinner—and—I might possibly have been mistaken,

sir—but I fancied he looked at me as if he wished me to feel myself his debtor. Do you understand me, sir? It annoyed me; and I wish to get out of his hands as soon as possible.”

“Rely upon it, my lord, it shall be attended to this very day,” replied Gammon, scarcely able—troubled though he was—to suppress a smile at the increasing symptoms of purse-pride in the Earl, whose long empty coffers were being so rapidly and unexpectedly replenished by the various enterprises into which, under Gammon’s auspices, his lordship had entered. While the Earl was speaking, the carriage drew up at the door of the company’s office, and Gammon alighted. The Earl, however, finding that all the gentlemen whom he had left there had quitted, drove off west-ward, at a smart pace, and reached the House in time for the matters which he had mentioned to Mr. Gammon. That gentleman soon dropped the languid demeanour he had worn in Lord Dreddlington’s presence, and addressed himself with energy and decision to a great number of important and difficult matters requiring his attention—principally connected with several of the public companies in which he was interested—and one of which, in particular, required the greatest possible care and tact, in order to prevent its bursting—prematurely. He had also to get through a considerable arrear of professional business, and to write several letters on the private business of Lord Dreddlington, and of Mr. Titmouse—respectively. Nay, he had one or two still more urgent calls upon his attention. First came the action against himself for £4,000 penalties, for bribery, arising out of the Yatton election, and as to which he had received, that afternoon, a very gloomy “*opinion*” from Mr. Lynx, who was advising him on his defence. Much in the same plight, also, were Messrs. Bloodsuck, Muddint, and Woodlouse, for whom Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap were defending similar actions; and who were worried out of their lives by daily letters from their terror-stricken clients, as to the prospects of the several causes in which they were so deeply interested. All these actions were being pressed forward by the plaintiffs with a view to trial at the ensuing Yorkshire Assizes; had been made, by the plaintiffs, special juries; and infinitely to Gammon’s vexation and alarm, he had found, on hurrying to retain Mr. Subtle, that he, Mr. Sterling, and Mr. Crstyal had been already retained for the plaintiffs! Lastly, he was dreadfully teased by an action of seduction, which had, a few days before, been brought against Mr. Titmouse; and which Gammon, finding it to be a very bad case, was making great efforts to compromise. To each and every of these matters, he gave the attention that was due—and, about seven o’clock, having finished his labours for the day, repaired, a good deal exhausted, to his chambers at Thavies’ Inn. After a slight repast, he proceeded to draw up confidential “*instructions*” for Mr. Frankpledge, to frame the deeds necessary to carry into effect his contemplated arrangement with Titmouse. That did not take him long; and having sealed up his packet and addressed it, he threw himself down on the sofa, and gave himself up to anxious meditation, for he was aware that he was now, as it were, touching the very crisis of his fortunes. Again, again, and again he recurred to the incident of the day—the destruction of his documents by Titmouse; and cursed his own inconceivable stupidity, even aloud. Yet he could not avoid indulging at the same time in secret pride and exultation at the admirable presence of mind which he had displayed—the successful skill with which he had encountered so sudden, singular, and serious an emergency. But what would be the effect of the destruction of those documents, upon *certain secret arrangements* of his connected with Titmouse’s recovery of the Yatton property?—a question which occasioned Gammon great perplexity and apprehension. Then, as to Gammon’s rent charge of £2,000 per annum on the Yatton property—he bethought himself, with no little uneasiness, of some expressions concerning Titmouse’s property,

let fall by the Earl that day; and if his lordship should persevere in his determination to become minutely acquainted with the state of Titmouse's property, how could the new and heavy incumbrance about to be laid upon it possibly escape discovery? and, if it did, how was it to be accounted for, or supported? Confound it! It seemed as if fate were bent upon urging on a catastrophe!

"Shall I," thought Gammon, "wait till I am challenged on the subject, and then fire my shot, and bring his lordship down from the tight-rope? Then, however, I cannot but appear to have known the thing from the very beginning; and who knows what liabilities, civil or criminal—of fraud or conspiracy—may be attached to what I have done! Shall I wait for a convenient, though early opportunity, and rush with dismay and confusion, into the Earl's presence as with a discovery only just made? By Heaven! but the thing wears already a very ugly appearance. If it comes out, what an uproar will be in the world! The lightning will fall on my head first, unless I take care. The discovery will doubtless kill Lord Dreddlington; and as for his daughter, it may overturn the little reason she has!"

Passing from this subject, Gammon surveyed his other relations with the Earl, which were becoming daily more critical. He had seduced his lordship into various mercantile speculations, such as had already placed him in a very questionable point of view, as taking deliberate advantage of the raging mania for bubble companies. In fact, Gammon had, by his skilful manoeuvring, already put into Lord Dreddlington's pocket some forty thousand pounds, and at the same time involved his lordship in liabilities which he never dreamed of and even Gammon himself had not contemplated. Then he warmed with his apparent proximity to Parliament (to that part of Titmouse's bargain Gammon resolved to hold him to the very letter), which he was sure of entering on the very next election. By that time he would have realized a sum, through his connection with the various companies, which, even independently of the income to be derived thereafter from the Yatton property, would render him so far independent as to warrant him in dissolving partnership with Messrs. Quirk and Snap, and quitting at least the *practice* of the profession.

Mr. Gammon was a man of very powerful mind, possessing energies of the highest order, and for the development and display of which he felt, and fretted when he felt, his present position in society, afforded him no scope whatever, till at last he had entered upon that series of bold but well-conceived plans and purposes with which he has been represented as occupied since the time when he first became the secret master of the fortunes of Titmouse. His ambition was boundless, and he felt within himself a capacity for the management of political affairs of no ordinary magnitude, could he but force himself into the regions where his energies and qualifications could be discovered and appreciated. Indeed, I will undertake to say that, had Gammon only been a good man, he would in all probability, have become a great one. But to proceed with the matters which were then occupying his busy brain. There was yet one upon which all his thoughts settled with a sort of agitating interest—his connection with the Aubreys; and whenever that name occurred to his thoughts, one beauteous image rose before him like that of an angel—I mean Miss Aubrey. She was the first object that had ever excited in him any, the faintest, semblance of the passion of *love*—that love, I mean, which is in a manner purified and sublimated from all grossness or sensuality by a due appreciation of intellectual and moral excellence. When he dwelt upon the character of Miss Aubrey, and for a moment realized the possibility of a union with her, he felt, as it were, elevated above himself. Then her person was very beautiful; and there was a certain bewitching *something* about her manners, which Gammon could only *feel*, not describe; in short his *passion*.

for her had risen to a most extraordinary pitch of intensity, and became a sort of infatuation. In spite of all that had happened at Yatton, he had contrived to continue, and was at that moment, on terms of considerable intimacy with the Aubreys: and had, moreover, been all the while so watchful over himself as to have given none of them any reason to suspect the state of his feelings towards Miss Aubrey; and, on the other hand, nothing had ever transpired to give him the slightest inkling of the state of matters between Miss Aubrey and Delamere—with the exception of one solitary circumstance which had at the moment excited his suspicions—Mr. Delamere's contesting the borough of Yatton. Though he had watched for it, however, nothing had afterwards occurred calculated to confirm his suspicion. He had taken infinite pains to keep a good name in Vivian Street, with great art representing, from time to time, his disgust for the conduct and character of Titmouse and the reluctance with which he discharged his duty towards that gentleman. He made a point of alluding to the "gross and malignant insult," which had been offered at the hustings to the venerable Vicar of Yatton, and which, he said, was a sudden suggestion of Mr. Titmouse's, and carried into effect by "that vile Unitarian parson, Mudflint," in defiance of Mr. Gammon's wishes to the contrary. He represented himself as still haunted by the mild, reproachful look with which Dr. Tatham had regarded him, as though he had been the author of the insult. The account which appeared in the *True Blue* of his indignant interference on the occasion of Mr. Delamere's being struck on the hustings, was calculated, as Mr. Gammon conceived to corroborate his representations, and aid the impression he was so anxious to produce. For the same reason Mr. Gammon, whenever he had been at Yatton, had acted with great caution so as to give no cause of offence to Dr. Tatham; to whom he from time to time complained, in confidence, of those very acts of Mr. Titmouse which had been dictated to him by Mr. Gammon. Thus *reasoned* Mr. Gammon; but it would indeed have been singular had he *succeeded* as he desired and expected. He lost sight of the proverbial influence of one's wishes over one's belief. In imagining that he had concealed from the Aubreys all the unfavourable features of his conduct, was he not, in some degree, exhibiting the folly of the bird, which, thrusting its head only into the bush, imagines that it has thereby concealed its whole body?

The Aubreys knew amply sufficient to warrant a general dislike and distrust of Mr. Gammon: but there existed no reasons for avoiding any line of conduct which Gammon might choose to consider offensive. Mr. Aubrey justly regarded him as standing, at present, alone between him and some of his most serious liabilities. If Gammon, to accomplish objects to them undiscoverable, wore a mask—why challenge his enmity by attempting to tear off that mask? Mr. Aubrey governed his movements, therefore, with a prudent caution; and though, after the election and the infamous decision of the election committee, Gammon was received at Vivian Street—whither he went with no little anxiety and trepidation—it was with a visibly increased coolness and reserve, but still with studious *courtesy*. But he felt that something must at length be *done*, or attempted, to carry into effect his fond wishes with reference to Miss Aubrey. Months had elapsed, and their relative position seemed totally unchanged since the first evening that his manoeuvre had procured him a brief introduction to Mrs. Aubrey's drawing-room. In fact, he considered that the time had arrived for making known, in some way or another, the state of his feelings to Miss Aubrey; and after long deliberation, he resolved to do so without loss of time, and, moreover, personally. He had a fearful suspicion that he should be—at all events at first unsuccessful; and now that, having taken his determination, he passed in rapid review all their intercourse, he perceived less and less ground for being sanguine; for he felt that Miss

Aubrey's manner towards him had been throughout more cold and guarded than that of either Mr. or Mrs. Aubrey. Like a prudent general contemplating the contingencies of an important expedition, and calculating his means of encountering them, Gammon considered—*persuasion* failing—what means of *compulsion* had he? He came, at length, finally to the conclusion, that his resources were at that moment most available; and, moreover, that his circumstances *required* an immediate move.

The very next day, about ten o'clock, he sallied forth from his chambers, and bent his steps towards Vivian Street, intending to keep watch for at least a couple of hours with a view to ascertaining whether Mrs. Aubrey's going out alone would afford him an opportunity of seeing Miss Aubrey, alone and undisturbed; reasonably reckoning on the absence of Mr. Aubrey at the Temple. That day, however, Mr. Gammon watched in vain—during the time that he stayed, only the servants and the children quitted the door. The next day he walked deliberately close past the house: was that brilliant and tasteful performance of the piano, *hers*? Again, however, he was unsuccessful. The next day, from a safe distance, he beheld both Mrs. and Miss Aubrey, accompanied by a female servant and the children, quit the house, and walk in the direction of the Park, whither he followed their movements with a beating heart. The next time, he saw Miss Aubrey leave the house, accompanied only by little Charles, and he instantly turned his steps despondingly eastward. Two days afterwards, however, Gammon's perseverance was rewarded; for shortly after eleven o'clock, he beheld Mrs. Aubrey, accompanied by the two children, quit the house, and turn towards the Park. Gammon's heart began to beat hard. Though he never cared much for dress, his appearance on the present occasion afforded indications of some little *attention* to it; and he appeared simply a well-dressed gentleman, as, after a moment's somewhat flurried pause, he knocked and rang at Mr. Aubrey's door.

"Is Mr. Aubrey within?" he inquired of the very pretty and respectable-looking maidservant, who presently answered his summons. "No, sir; he is never here after—" Perhaps *Mrs. Aubrey*—"No, sir; there is only Miss Aubrey at home; my mistress and the children are gone out into the Park, and Miss Aubrey is writing letters, or she would have gone with my mistress." "Perhaps—I could see Miss Aubrey for a moment?" inquired Gammon, with as matter-of-fact an air as he could assume. "Certainly, sir—she is in the drawing-room. Will you walk upstairs?" said the girl, who of course knew him well, as not an infrequent visitor at the house. So she led the way upstairs, he following, and with somewhat fading colour.

"*Mr. Gammon!*" he presently heard, as he stood on the landing, echoed in the rich and soft voice of Miss Aubrey, who seemed to speak in a tone of great surprise, in answer to the servant's announcement. "Why, Fanny, did you not say that neither your master nor mistress was at home?" Gammon next heard hastily asked in a lower tone by Miss Aubrey, and his countenance fell a little; for there was a tone of displeasure, or chagrin, in her voice, especially as she added, "You should have said that I was *engaged!* However, show him in, Fanny;" and the next moment Mr. Gammon found himself bowing his way towards Miss Aubrey, with whom, for the first time in his life, he found himself alone.

She was sitting writing at her desk, before which stood, in a small flower-glass, a beautiful moss-rose. There was a little air of negligence in the arrangement of her hair, and her light morning costume displayed her figure to infinite advantage. There was really something inexpressibly lovely in her whole appearance, seen, though she was, at that moment, by Gammon, through a faint mist of displeasure which she had thrown around herself.

"Good morning, Mr. Gammon," she commenced, rising a little from her

chair ; and sinking again into it, slightly turned it towards him, gazing at him with some curiosity.

"May I venture to hope, madam, that I am not intruding upon you?" said he, seating himself in the chair nearest to him, and placing his hat upon the ground.

"My brother always leaves at half-past nine ; is he not at the Temple to-day, Mr. Gammon?" she added a little eagerly—for the first time observing something unusual in the expression of his countenance.

"I really don't know—in fact, I have not been there to-day ; I thought it better, perhaps——" He paused for a second.

"I sincerely trust, Mr. Gammon," interrupted Miss Aubrey, slightly changing colour, and looking with great anxiety at Mr. Gammon—"that nothing unpleasant—unfortunate—has happened : do, pray, Mr. Gammon !" she continued earnestly, turning her chair full towards him—"for Heaven's sake, tell me !"

"I assure you, madam, upon my honour, that nothing whatever has happened, that I know of, since last we met."

"Oh dear—I was getting so alarmed!" said she, with a faint sigh, hastily putting back the curls which were clustering rather more luxuriantly than usual over her fair cheek.

"Certainly, madam, you have no occasion to be alarmed ; I have, however, an errand—one to *me*, at least, of inexpressible importance," he commenced, and in a lower key than that in which he had previously spoken ; and there was a peculiarity in his manner which quite riveted Miss Aubrey's eye upon his expressive—and now, she was plainly, agitated—countenance. What can possibly be the matter? thought she, as she made a courteous but somewhat formal inclination towards him, and said something about "begging him to proceed."

"I hope, madam, that comparatively few as have been my opportunities of becoming acquainted with it, I may venture to express my profound appreciation of your superior character."

"Really, sir," interrupted Miss Aubrey—"you are not candid with me. I am now certain that you have some unpleasant communication to make ! Do, I entreat of you, Mr. Gammon, give me credit for a *little* presence of mind and firmness : let me know the worst, and be prepared to break it to my brother and sister." Gammon seemed unable to bear her bright blue eyes fixed upon his own, which he directed to the floor, while his cheek flushed. Then he looked again at her ; and with an eye that explained all, and drove away the bloom from Miss Aubrey's cheek, while it also suspended, for a moment, her breathing.

"Oh, forgive me for an instant—for one moment bear with me, Miss Aubrey !" continued Gammon, in a voice of low and thrilling pathos—"this interview agitates me almost to death ; it is that which for a thousand hours of intense—absorbing—agonizing doubts and fears, I have been looking forward to !" Miss Aubrey sat perfectly silent and motionless, gazing intently at him, with blanched cheek : he might have been addressing a Grecian statue. "And now—now that it has at last arrived—when I feel as if I were breathing a new—a maddening atmosphere, occasioned by your presence—by the sight of your surpassing loveliness——"

"Gracious mercy, sir ! what can you mean !" at length interrupted Miss Aubrey, with a slight start—at the same time slipping her chair a little further from Mr. Gammon. "I declare, sir, I do not in the least understand you," she continued, with much energy ; but her increasing paleness showed the effect which his extraordinary conduct had produced upon her. She made a strong and successful effort, however, to recover her self-possession:

"I perceive, madam, that you are agitated——" "I am, sir ! astonished !

—shocked!—I could not have imagined——” “Madam! madam! at the risk of being deemed unkind—cruel—if I *die* for it, I cannot resist telling you that I reverence—I love you to a degree——” “Oh, Heavens!” murmured Miss Aubrey, still gazing with an air of amazement at him. Several times she thought of rising to ring the bell, and at once get rid of so astounding an interruption and intrusion; but for several reasons she abstained from doing so as long as possible.

“It would be ridiculous, sir,” said she, at length, with sudden spirit and dignity, “to affect ignorance of your meaning and intentions; but may I venture to ask what conduct of mine—what single act of mine—or word—or look—has ever induced you to imagine—for one moment to indulge so insane——”

“Alas, madam, that which you could not conceal or control—your incomparable excellence—your beauty—loveliness—Madam! madam! the mere sight of your transcendent charms—my soul sank prostrate before you the first moment that I ever saw you——”

All this was uttered by Gammon in a very low tone, and with passionate fervour of manner. Miss Aubrey trembled visibly, and had grown very cold. A little vinaigrette stood beside her—and its stimulating powers were infinitely serviceable, and at length aided her in making head against her rebellious feelings.

“I certainly ought to feel flattered, sir,” said she, rapidly recovering herself—“by the high terms in which you are pleased to speak of me—of one who has not the slightest claim upon your good opinion. I really cannot conceive what conduct of mine can have led you to imagine that such an—*an-application*—as this could be successful—or received otherwise than with astonishment—and, if persisted in—*displeasure*, Mr. Gammon.” This she said in her natural manner, and very pointedly. “Miss Aubrey—permit me——” said Gammon passionately. “I cannot, sir—I have heard already too much; and I am sure, that when a lady requests a *gentleman* to desist from conduct which pains and shocks her—sir,” she added hastily and peremptorily—“I beg you will at once desist from addressing me in so very improper a strain and manner.”

“Indulge my agonized feelings for one moment, Miss Aubrey,” said Gammon, with desperate energy—“alas? I had suspected—I had feared—that our respective positions in society would lead you to despise so comparatively humble and obscure a person, in point of station and circumstances——”

“*Sir!*” exclaimed Kate magnificently, drawing up her figure to its utmost height—her manner almost petrifying Gammon, whose last words she had most unaccountably imagined, at the moment, to amount to a bitter sarcastic allusion to their fallen fortunes, and diminished personal consequence in society; but she was quickly undeceived, as he proceeded, fervently—“Yes, madam—your birth—your family connections—your transcendent, mental, and personal qualities, shining all the brighter in the gloom of adversity——”

“I—I—I beg your pardon, sir—I misunderstood you,” said Kate, discovering her error, and colouring violently—“but it is even more painful to me to listen to the language you are addressing to me. Since you urge me to it, I beg you to understand, sir, that if by what you have been saying to me, I am to gather that you are making me an offer of your addresses—I decline them at once, most peremptorily, as a thing quite out of the question.” The tone and manner in which this was said—the determination and hauteur perceptible in her striking and expressive features—blighted all the nascent hopes of Gammon; who turned perfectly pale, and looked the very image of misery and despair. The workings of his strongly marked features told of the agony of his feelings. Neither of them spoke for a few moments, “Alas! madam,”

at length he inquired, in a tremulous voice, "am I presumptuous, if I intimate a fear—which I dare hardly own to myself even—that I am too late—that there is *some more fortunate*——" Miss Aubrey blushed scarlet.

"Sir," said she, with quick indignant energy. "I *should* certainly consider such inquiries—most—*presumptuous*—most offensive—most unwarranted by anything that has ever passed between us"—and indeed her eye quite shone with indignation.

"You cannot but be aware, sir, that you are greatly taxing my forbearance—nay, sir, I feel that you are taking a very great liberty in making any such inquiries or suggestions," continued Miss Aubrey, proudly, but more calmly; "but, as your manner is unobjectionable and respectable, I have no objection to say, sir, most unhesitatingly, that the reason you hint at is not in the least concerned in the answer I have given. I have declined your proposals, sir, simply because I *choose* to decline them—because I have not, nor ever could have, the least disposition to entertain them."

Gammon could not, at the moment, determine whether she really had or had not a pre-engagement.

"Madam, you would bear with me did you but know the exquisite suffering your words occasion me! Your hopeless tone and manner appear to my soul to consign it to perdition—to render me perfectly careless about life," said Gammon, with irresistible pathos: and Miss Aubrey, as she looked and listened, in spite of herself, pitied him. "I might, perhaps, establish *some* claim to your favour, were I at liberty to recount to you my long unwearied exertions to shield your noble-spirited brother—nay, all of you—from impending trouble and danger—to avert it from you."

"We are indeed deeply sensible of your kindness towards us, Mr. Gammon," replied Miss Aubrey with her usual sweetness and fascinating frankness of manner, which *now* he could not bear to behold.

"Suffer me, Miss Aubrey, but one word more," he continued eagerly, apprehensive that she was about to check him. "Were you but aware of the circumstances under which I come to throw myself at your feet—myself, and all I have—nor is that little, for I am in independent circumstances—I shall soon be in the House of Commons"—Miss Aubrey exhibited still more unequivocal symptoms of impatience—"and for ever have abandoned the hateful walk in life to which for the last few years——"

"I suppose I *must* listen to you, sir, however uselessly to yourself and disagreeable and painful to me. If, after all I have said, you choose to persevere," said Miss Aubrey with calm displeasure.

But Gammon persevered.—"I say, Miss Aubrey, that could you but catch a glimpse—one momentary glimpse—of the troubles—the dangers which lurk around you all—ininitely greater than any which you have even yet experienced, severe and terrible though these have been—which are every day coming nearer and nearer to you——" "What *do* you mean, Mr. Gammon?" interrupted Miss Aubrey alarmedly. "—And which, eager and anxious as may, and shall be, my efforts, I may be unable any longer to avert from you—you would at least appreciate the pure and disinterested motives with which I set out upon my truly disastrous mission."

"Once more, Mr. Gammon, I assure you that I feel—that we all of us feel—a lively gratitude towards you for the great services you have rendered us; not how *can* that possibly vary my resolution? Surely, Mr. Gammon, you will not require me to enter again upon a most unpleasant——" Gammon heaved a profound sigh.—"With regard to your intimation of the danger which menaces us—alas! we have seen much trouble—and Providence may design us to see much more—I own, Mr. Gammon, that I am disturbed by what you have said to me on that subject."

"I have but one word more to say, madam," said Gammon in a low, passionate tone, evidently preparing to sink upon one knee, and to assume an imploring attitude; on which Miss Aubrey rose from her chair, and stepping back a pace or two, said, with great resolution, and in an indignant manner—"If you do not instantly resume your seat, sir, I shall ring the bell; for you are beginning to take advantage of my present defenceless position—you are *persecuting* me, and I will not suffer it.—Sir, resume your seat, or I summon the servant into the room—a humiliation I could have wished to spare you."

Her voice was not half so imperative as was her eye. He felt that his cause was hopeless—he bowed profoundly, and said in a low tone—"I obey you, madam."

Neither of them spoke for some moments. At length—"I am sure, sir," said Miss Aubrey, looking at her watch, "you will forgive me for reminding you that when you entered I was engaged writing letters"—and she glanced at her desk—"for which purpose alone it is that I am not now accompanying my sister and the children."

"I feel too painfully, madam, that I am intruding; but I shall soon cease to trouble you. Every one has some great bitterness to pass through at some time or other of his life—and I have this instant passed through mine," replied Gammon gloomily. "I will not say that *the bitterness of death is past*; but I feel that life has henceforth, as far as I am concerned, nothing worth pursuing." Miss Aubrey remained silent while he spoke.—"Before we part, Miss Aubrey, and close, as far as I—nay, as far, it may be, as both of us are concerned—a very memorable interview, I have yet one communication to make, to which you will listen with absorbing interest. It will be made to you in such confidence as, having heard it, you may consider yourself at liberty conscientiously to keep from every person upon earth; and I shall leave it to produce such effect upon you as it may."

"I shall not disguise from you, sir, that your manner and your language alarm me terribly," said Miss Aubrey, peculiarly struck by the sinister expression of his eye—one quite inconsistent with the sad, subdued, gentle tone and manner of his address. "I am not *anxious* to receive so dark and mysterious a communication as you hint at; and, if you choose to make it, I shall use my own discretion as to keeping it myself, or mentioning it to any one whom I may choose—of *that* I assure you. You see that I am agitated; I own it," she added, dropping her voice, and pressing her left hand against her side; "but I am prepared to hear anything you may choose to tell me—that I *ought* to hear.—Have mercy, sir," she added in a melting voice, "on a woman whose nerves you have already sufficiently shaken!"

Gammon gazed at her with a bright and passionate eye that would have drunk her very soul. After a moment's pause—"Madam, it is this," said he in a very low tone: "I have the means—I declare in the presence of Heaven, and on the word and honour of a man"—[Oh, Gammon! Gammon! Gammon! have you forgotten what occurred between you and your friend Titmouse one short week ago? Strange, infatuated man! what can you mean? What if she should take you at your word?]"—"of restoring to your brother all that he has *lost*—the Yatton property, Miss Aubrey—immediately—permanently—without fear of future disturbance—by due process of law—openly and most honourably."

"You are trifling with me, sir," gasped Miss Aubrey, faintly, very faintly—her cheek blanched, and her eye riveted upon that of Gammon.

"Before God, madam, I speak the truth," replied Gammon solemnly.

Miss Aubrey seemed struggling ineffectually to heave a deep sigh, and pressed both hands upon her left side, over her heart.

"You are ill, very ill, Miss Aubrey," said Gammon with alarm, rising

from his chair. She also rose, rather hastily; turned towards the window, and with feeble trembling hands tried to open it, as if to relieve her faintness by the fresh air. But it was too late; poor Kate had been at length overpowered, and Gammon reached her just in time to receive her inanimate figure, which sunk into his arms. Never in his life had he been conscious of the feelings he that moment experienced, as he felt her pressure against his arm and knee, and gazed upon her beautiful but death-like features. He felt as though he had been brought into momentary contact with an angel. Every fibre within him thrilled. She moved not; she breathed not. He dared not kiss her lip, her cheek, her forehead, but raised her soft white hand to his lips, and kissed it with indescribable tenderness and reverence. Then, after a moment's pause of irresolution, he gently drew her to the sofa, and laid her down, supporting her head and applying her vinaigrette, till a deep-drawn sigh evidenced returned consciousness. Before she had opened her eyes, or could have become aware of the assistance he had rendered her, he had withdrawn to a respectful distance, and was gazing at her with deep anxiety. It was several minutes before her complete restoration—which, however, the fresh air entering through the windows, which Gammon hastily threw open, added to the incessant use of her vinaigrette, greatly accelerated.

"I hardly know, sir," she commenced, in a very low and faint tone of voice, and looking languidly at him, "whether I really heard you say, or only dreamed that I heard you say, something most extraordinary about Yatton?"

"I pray you, madam, to wait until you are completely restored; but it was indeed no dream—it was my voice which you heard utter the words you allude to; and when you can bear it, I am ready to repeat them as the words, indeed, of truth and soberness."

"I am ready now, sir—I beg you will say quickly what you have to say," replied Miss Aubrey, with returning firmness of tone and calmness of manner; at the same time passing her snowy handkerchief feebly over her forehead.

He repeated what he had said before. She listened with increasing excitement of manner; her emotions at length overmastered her, and she burst into tears, and wept for some moments unrestrainedly.

Gammon gazed at her in silence; and then unable to bear the sight of her sufferings, turned aside his head, and gazed towards the opposite corner of the room. How little he thought that the object on which his eyes accidentally settled, a most splendid harp, had been only a few days before, presented to Miss Aubrey by Mr. Delamere!

"What misery, Miss Aubrey, has the sight of your distress occasioned me!" said Gammon at length; "and yet why should my communication have distressed you?"

"I cannot doubt, Mr. Gammon, the truth of what you have so solemnly told me," she replied, in a tremulous voice; but will you not tell my unfortunate, my high-minded, my almost broken-hearted brother?" Again she burst into a fit of weeping.

"Must I—*dare* I—say it, Miss Aubrey?" presently inquired Gammon in a broken voice; "can I say it without occasioning what I dread more than I can express—your displeasure! The use to be made of my power *rests with you alone*." She shook her head bitterly and despairingly, and hid her face in her handkerchief while he proceeded. "One word—one blessed word from your lips—and before this very day shall have passed away, I strike down the wretched puppet that at present defiles Yatton—replace your noble-minded brother at Yatton—restore you all to its delicious shades—Oh, Miss Aubrey, how you will love them! A thousand times dearer than ever! Every trace of the wretched idiot now there shall vanish; and let all this come to pass *before I presume to claim—*"

"It is impossible, sir," replied Miss Aubrey, with the calmness of despair, "even were you to place my brother on the throne of England. Is it not cruel—shocking—that if you know my brother is really entitled—nay, it is monstrous injustice!—What may be the means at your command I know not—I shall not inquire; if it is to be purchased only on the terms you mention"—she involuntarily shuddered—"be it so—I cannot help it; and if my brother and his family must perish because I reject your addresses—"

"Say not that word, Miss Aubrey? Do not shut out *all* hope—Recall it! For God's sake consider the consequences to your brother—to his family! I tell you that malice and rapacity are at this moment gleaming like wild wolves within a few paces of you—ready to rush upon you. Did you but see them as distinctly as I do, you would indeed shudder and shrink—"

"I do, sir; but we trust in a merciful Providence," replied Miss Aubrey, clasping together her hands, "and resign ourselves to the will of Heaven."

"May not Heaven have brought about *this meeting* between us as a mode of——" "Monstrous!" exclaimed Miss Aubrey, in a voice and with a look that for a moment silenced him.

"It is high time that you should leave me, sir," presently said Miss Aubrey, determinedly. "I have suffered surely sufficiently already; and my first answer is also my last. I beg now, sir, that you will retire."

"Madam, you are obeyed," replied Gammon rising, and speaking in a tone of sorrowful deference. He felt that his fate was sealed. "I now seem fully aware, to myself even, of the unwarrantable liberty I have taken, and solicit your forgiveness—" Miss Aubrey bowed to him loftily.—"I will not presume to solicit your silence to Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey concerning the visit I have paid you?" he continued very anxiously.

"I am not in the habit, sir, of concealing *anything* from my brother and sister; but I shall freely exercise my own discretion in the matter."

"Well, madam," said he, preparing to move towards the door, while Miss Aubrey raised her hand to the bell—"in taking leave of you," he paused,— "let me hope, not for ever—receive my solemn assurance, given before Heaven! that, haughtily as you have repelled my advances this day, I will yet continue to do all that is in my power to avert the troubles now threatening your brother—which, I fear, however, will be but of little avail! Farewell, farewell, Miss Aubrey!" he exclaimed; and was the next moment rapidly descending the stairs. Miss Aubrey, bursting afresh into tears, threw herself again upon the sofa, and continued long in a state of excessive agitation.

Mr. Gammon walked eastward at a rapid pace, and in a state of mind which cannot be described. How he loathed the sight of Saffron Hill, and its disgusting approaches! He merely looked into the office for a moment, saying that he felt too much indisposed to attend to business that day; and then betook himself to his solitary chambers—a thousand times more solitary and cheerless than ever they had appeared before—where he remained in a sort of reverie for hours. About eleven o'clock that night, he was guilty of a strange piece of extravagance; for, his fevered soul being unable to find rest anywhere, he set off for Vivian Street, and paced up and down it, with his eye constantly fixed upon Mr. Aubrey's house; he saw the lights disappear from the drawing-room, and reappear in the bed-rooms; then also he watched out—still he lingered in the neighbourhood, which seemed to have a sort of fatal fascination about it; and it was past three o'clock before, exhausted in mind and body, he regained his chamber, and throwing himself upon the bed, slept from mere weariness.

Let us now turn to a man of a very different description—Mr. Aubrey. He had spent nearly a year in the real study of the law; during which time I have not the least hesitation in saying that he had made at least five times the

progress that is generally made by even the most successful of those who devote themselves to the legal profession. He had, moreover, during the same period, produced five or six exceedingly able political dissertations, and several important contributions to historical literature; and the reader will not be surprised to learn, that such exertions as these, and such anxieties as were his, had told visibly on the appearance of Mr. Aubrey. He was very thin; his cheek had lost its colour; his eye was oppressed; his spirits had lost their buoyancy, except in the few intervals which he was permitted, by his harassing labours, of domestic enjoyment. He still bore up, however, against his troubles with an unyielding resolution; feeling that Providence had called upon him to do his uttermost, and await the result with patience and faith. Nothing had occurred during this long interval to brighten his prospects—to diminish his crushing load of liability by a hair's weight. But his well-disciplined mind now stood him in noble stead, and enabled him to realize a daily consciousness of advancement in the pursuits to which he had devoted himself. Well indeed may it be said, that there is no grander spectacle for angels or men, than a great mind struggling with adversity.

The reader may imagine the alarm occasioned Mr. Aubrey on his return from the Temple on the evening of the day on which Gammon had paid his remarkable visit to Miss Aubrey, by the sight of the troubled countenances of his wife and sister. Mrs. Aubrey had returned home within about half an hour after Mr. Gammon's leaving Vivian Street, and to her Miss Aubrey instantly communicated the extraordinary proposal which he had made to her, all, in fact, that had passed between them—with the exception of the astounding information concerning the alleged possibility of their restoration to Yatton. The two ladies had, indeed, determined on concealing the whole matter from Mr. Aubrey, at all events for the present; but their perceptible agitation increasing as he questioned them concerning the cause of it, rendered concealment impossible, and they told him frankly (excepting only the matter above mentioned) the singular and most embarrassing incident which had happened in his absence. Blank amazement was succeeded by vivid indignation in Mr. Aubrey, as soon as he had heard of this attempt to take advantage of their circumstances: and for several hours he was excessively agitated. In vain they tried to soothe him; in vain did Kate throw her arms fondly round him, and implore him, for all their sakes, to take no notice to Mr. Gammon of what had happened; in vain did she protest that she would give him instant intelligence of any future attempt by Mr. Gammon to renew his offer; in vain did they both remind him, with great emotion, of the fearful power over all of them which was in Mr. Gammon's hands. He was peremptory and inflexible, and, moreover, frank and explicit; and told them, on quitting home the next morning, that, though they might rely on his discretion and temper, he had resolved to communicate that day, either personally or by letter, with Mr. Gammon; not only peremptorily forbidding any renewal of his proposals, but also requesting him to discontinue his visits in Vivian Street.

"Oh, Charles! Charles! be punctually home by six!" exclaimed they, as he embraced them both at parting, and added, bursting afresh into tears, "do consider the agony—the dreadful suspense we shall be in all day!" "I will return by six, to a minute! Don't fear for me!" he replied, with a smile—which, however, instantly disappeared, as soon as he had quitted their presence.

Old Mr. Quirk was the next morning, about ten o'clock, over head and ears in business of all kinds—and sadly missed the clear-headed and energetic Gammon; so, fearing that that gentleman's indisposition must still continue, inasmuch as there were no symptoms of his coming to the office as usual, he took off his spectacles, locked his room-door, in order to prevent any one by any possibility looking on any of the numerous letters and papers lying on his

table; and set off to make a call upon Mr. Gammon—whose countenance, flushed and harassed, strongly corroborated what he said on the subject of his indisposition. Still, he said, he could attend to any business which Mr. Quirk was prepared then to mention; whereupon Mr. Quirk took from his pocket a piece of paper, put on his glasses, and put questions to him from a number of memoranda which he had made for the purpose. Gammon's answers were brief, and pointed, and explicit, on all matters mentioned—as might have been expected from one of his great ability and energy—but his muddle-headed companion could not carry away a single clear idea of what had been so clearly told him; and without avowing the fact, of which he felt, however, a painful consciousness, simply determined to do nothing that he could possibly avoid doing, till Mr. Gammon made his reappearance at the office, and reduced the little chaos there into something like form and order.

Before he quitted Mr. Gammon, that gentleman quietly and easily led the conversation towards the subject of the various out-standing debts due to the firm.

"Ah, drat it!" quoth the old gentleman, briskly—"the heaviest, you know, is—eh?—I suppose, however," he added apprehensively, and scratching his head, "I mustn't name *that*—I mean that fellow Aubrey's account—without our coming to words." "Why—stay! stay," said Mr. Gammon, with a gravely thoughtful air—"I don't see *that*, either, Mr. Quirk. Forbearance has its limits. It may be abused, Mr. Quirk." "Ecod! I should think so!" quoth Mr. Quirk eagerly—"and I know who's abused *somebody's* forbearance—eh, Gammon?" "I understand you, my dear sir," replied Gammon with a sigh—"I fear I must plead no longer for him—I have gone already, perhaps, much further than my duty to the firm warranted."

"It's a heavy balance, Gammon—a very heavy balance, £1,446 odd, to be outstanding so long—he agreed to pay interest on't—didn't he, eh?—But really something ought to be done in it; and—come, Gammon! as you've had *your* turn so long, now comes mine!—Tip him over to *me*." "I should be very sorry to distress him, poor devil!" "Distress him? Our bill must be paid. D—n him! why don't he pay his debts? I pay mine—you pay yours—he must pay his." "Certainly. By the way," said Gammon suddenly, "if you were to take bold and decided steps, his friends would undoubtedly come forward and relieve him." "Ay! ay!—What do you think of three days—give him three days to turn about in?—There's he living all the while in a d—d fine house at the West End, like a gentleman—looks down, I'll be sworn, on us poor attorneys already, beggar as he is, because he's coming to the bar. Now mind, Gammon, no nonsense! I won't stand your coming in again as you did before—if I write—honour between thieves! eh?" "I pledge my honour to you, my dear sir, that I will interfere no more; but the law must take its course." "That's it!" said Mr. Quirk, rubbing his hands gleefully; "I'll tip him a tickler before he's a day older that shall wake him up—ah, ha!"

"You will do me one favour, Mr. Quirk, I am sure," said Mr. Gammon, with that civil but peremptory manner of his, which invariably commanded Quirk's assent to his suggestions—"You will insert a disclaimer in the letter of its emanating from *me*—or being with my consent." "Oh lud, yes! yes! anything." "Nay—rather *against my wish*, you know—eh? Just for appearance's sake—as I have always appeared so infernally civil to the man, till now."

"Will you draw it up yourself? And then, so as the *other* matter's all right—no finching—stick in as much palaver, Gammon!—ah ha!—as you like!" replied Quirk; who, as the proposal involved only a greater measure of discourtesy on *his* part, without any sacrifice of his *interest*, regarded it with perfect indifference. He took his leave of Gammon in better spirits than

those which he had carried with him. It having been thus determined on by the partners that within a day or two's time, Mr. Aubrey should be required to pay the whole balance, under penalty of an arrest—Gammon, on being left alone, folded his arms as he sat beside his breakfast table—and meditated on the probable results of this his first hostile move against Mr. Aubrey. "I wonder whether she's told him," thought he, with a slight palpitation—which was somewhat increased by a pretty sharp knock at his outer door. The colour suddenly deserted his cheek as he started from his seat, scattering on the floor nearly a dozen unopened letters which had been lying at his elbow on the table: and he stood still for a moment to subdue a little of his agitation, so as to enable him to present himself with some show of calmness before the visitor whom he felt perfectly certain that he should see on opening the door. He was right. The next minute beheld him ushering into his room, with a surprising degree of self-possession, Mr. Aubrey, whose countenance showed embarrassment and agitation.

"I have called upon you, Mr. Gammon," commenced Aubrey, taking the seat to which Mr. Gammon with great courtesy, motioned him, and then resumed his own, "in consequence of your visit yesterday to Vivian Street—of your surprising interview with my sister—your most unexpected, extraordinary proposal to her."

Mr. Gammon listened respectfully, with an air of earnest attention, evidently not intending to make any reply.

"It cannot surprise you, sir, that I should have been made acquainted with it immediately on my return home yesterday evening. It was undoubtedly my sister's *duty* to do so; but she did it, I am bound to acknowledge to you, sir, with great reluctance, as a matter of exquisitely painful delicacy. Sir, she has told me all that passed between you."

"I cannot presume, Mr. Aubrey, to find fault with anything Miss Aubrey may have thought proper to do; she *cannot* do wrong," replied Gammon, calmly, though Mr. Aubrey's last words had occasioned him lively anxiety as to the extent of Miss Aubrey's communications to her brother. He observed Mr. Aubrey's eyes fixed upon him steadfastly, and saw that he was labouring under much excitement. "If I have done anything calculated to inflict the slightest pain upon a lady for whom I have so profound—" he saw the colour mounting into Mr. Aubrey's cheek, and a sterner expression appearing in his eye—"a respect, or upon *you* or any of your family, I am distressed beyond measure."

"I perfectly appreciate, Mr. Gammon, the position in which we stand with regard to each other," said Mr. Aubrey, with forced calmness. "Though I am fearfully changed in respect of fortune, I am not a whit changed—*we are none of us changed*," he continued proudly, "in respect of personal feelings and character."

He paused: Gammon spoke not. Presently Mr. Aubrey resumed—"I am, as we are all, very deeply sensible of the obligation which you have conferred upon us, and at the same time feel that we are, to a great extent, placed at your mercy."

"Pray—I beg, Mr. Aubrey, that you will not speak in a strain which really hurts my feelings," interrupted Gammon earnestly; "and which nothing on my part has justified, nor can justify."

"Sir," continued Mr. Aubrey firmly, "I meant nothing in the least calculated wound your feelings, but merely to express my own; and let me, Mr. Gammon, without the least reserve or circumlocution, inform you that both my sister and I have felt vivid dissatisfaction at your conduct of yesterday; and I have deemed it expedient to lose no time in informing you that your proposals are utterly out of the question, and can never be entertained, under any circumstances, for one moment."

Had Aubrey been, instead of a mere pauper he really was, and in the presence of one whom he knew to be able to cast him instantly into prison, at that moment in the position he had formerly occupied, of wealth and greatness, he could not have spoken with an air of more dignified determination, and even *hauteur*; which Gammon perceived and fully appreciated.

"I am undoubtedly aware, sir, of the disparity between Miss Aubrey and myself in point of position," said he, coldly.

"I have said nothing of the kind that I am aware of, nor would I, on any account, say anything offensive to you, Mr. Gammon; but it is my duty to speak explicitly and decisively. I therefore now beg you to understand that your overtures must not, in any shape, or at any time, be renewed; and this I must insist upon without assigning or suggesting any reason whatever." Gammon listened attentively and silently. "I presume, Mr. Gammon, that I cannot be misunderstood?" added Mr. Aubrey, with a very perceptibly increased peremptoriness of manner.

"It would be difficult to misunderstand what you say, sir," replied Gammon; in whose dark bosom Mr. Aubrey's words had, at it were, stung and roused the serpent pride—which might have been seen with crest erect, and glaring eyes. But Mr. Gammon's external manner was calm and subdued.

"It gives me pain to be forced to add, Mr. Gammon," continued Mr. Aubrey, "that after what has taken place, we all of us feel—that—it will be better for you to discontinue your visits at my house. I am sure your own sense of delicacy will appreciate the necessity which exists for such a suggestion on my part?"

"I perfectly understand you, Mr. Aubrey," replied Gammon, in the same grave and guarded manner which he had preserved throughout their interview. "I shall offer no apology, sir, for conduct which I do not feel to require one. I conceive that I had a perfect right to make, with all due deference and respect, the offer which it appears has given you so much offence; for reasons, it may be, which justify you, but which I cannot speculate upon, nor do I wish to do so. It is impossible ever to see Miss Aubrey without becoming sensible of her loveliness, both of person and character. I have paid them homage: for the rest, the issue is simply—unfortunate. While I may not feel disposed, even if inclined to disregard your strict and solemn injunctions, I take leave to say, that my feelings towards Miss Aubrey cannot alter; and if in no *other* way they can be gratified, there is yet *one* which"—here he looked greatly moved, and changed colour—"yet remains open to me, to exhibit my regard for her in a tenfold anxiety to preserve her—to preserve all of you, Mr. Aubrey, from the approach of difficulty and danger. That much Miss Aubrey may have also told to you of what passed between us yesterday." He paused—from emotion apparently; but he was only considering intently whether he should endeavour to *ascertain* whether Mr. Aubrey had been put by his sister in possession of his (Gammon's) last communication to her; and then, however, that might be, whether he should himself break the matter to Mr. Aubrey. But he decided both questions in the negative, and proceeded, with a little excitement of manner—"There *are* dangers menacing you, I grieve to say, Mr. Aubrey, of the most serious description, which I may possibly be unable to avert from you! I fear I am losing that hold *upon others* which has enabled me hitherto to save you from rapacity and oppression! I regret to say that I can *answer* for others no longer; but all that man can do, still will I do. I have been most bitterly—most fearfully disappointed; but you shall ever find me a man of my word—of as high and rigid honour, perhaps, even, Mr. Aubrey, as yourself"—he paused and felt that he had made an impression on his silent auditor—"and I hereby pledge myself, in the presence of God, that so far as in *me* lies, there shall not a hair of any of your heads be touched,"

Again he paused. "I wish, Mr. Aubrey, you knew the pressure which has been for some time upon me—nay even this very morning——" he cast a melancholy and reluctant eye towards the letters which he had gathered up, and which he had placed beside him on the breakfast table—"I have received a letter—here it is—I know the handwriting; I almost dread to open it." Mr. Aubrey changed colour.

"I am at a loss to know to what *in particular* you are alluding, Mr. Gammon!" he interrupted anxiously.

"I will not at present say more on the subject; I devoutly hope my negotiations may be successful, and that the affair may not for many months, or even years, be *forced* upon your attention! Still, *were* I to do so, one effect, at least, it would have—to satisfy you of my honourable and *disinterested* motives in the offer which I presumed to make Miss Aubrey."

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Aubrey, with a melancholy air, and sighing deeply. "I can only place my trust in Providence—and I *do*. I have suffered much already; and if it be the will of Heaven that I should suffer more, I hope it will be proved that I have not suffered already—in *vain*!"

"Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon, gazing at him with a brightening eye, "my very soul owns the sublime presence of virtue, in your presence! It is exalting—it is ennobling—merely to be permitted to witness so heroic an example of constancy as you exhibit!"—He paused, and for some moments there was silence—"You do not distrust me, Mr. Aubrey?" said Gammon at length, with a confident air.

"No, Mr. Gammon!" replied Mr. Aubrey, eyeing him steadfastly. "I am not aware that I ever had any reason for doing so."

Shortly afterwards he took his departure; and as he bent his steps slowly, and with thoughtful air, towards the Temple, he saw one or two things, on his own part, during his interview with Gammon, to regret—his sternness and pride; but nothing on the part of Gammon that had not been admirable. Could Mr. Aubrey, however, but have seen the satanic smile which settled upon Mr. Gammon's features, as soon as, after cordially shaking his hand, he had calmly shut the door upon Mr. Aubrey, it might have occasioned some few misgivings as to that gentleman's sincerity. Mr. Gammon resumed his seat, and meditated upon their recent interview. Almost the first glance which he had caught of Mr. Aubrey's countenance, and the very first tones of his voice which had fallen on Gammon's ear, had inspired him with a deadly animosity against poor Aubrey, whose pride Gammon resolved to trample upon and crush into the dust. He was acquainted with the state of Aubrey's little finances, almost to a pound; for Aubrey had, under the circumstances, felt it even a duty to be frank with him upon that subject. He turned over in his mind, with great anxiety, the matter of the two promissory notes for five thousand pounds each, which he held in his hands, and which would be the best mode of setting into motion, *but with the hands of another*, those two dreadful instruments of torture and oppression—which, judiciously applied, might have the effect of humbling the pride and breaking the determination of Aubrey and of his sister. Long he considered the subject, in every point of view; and at length—"Ay, that will do!" said he to himself aloud; sighed, smiled, and gently tapped his fingers upon his ample forehead. Shortly afterwards, having ordered his laundress to take away the breakfast things, he took pen, ink, and paper, and sketched off the following draft of a letter, to be copied by Mr. Quirk, and signed in the name of the firm, and sent, Gammon finally determined, early in the ensuing week:—

"Saffron Hill, 9th July, 18—.

"DEAR SIR,—Owing to a most serious and unexpected pecuniary outlay which we are called upon to make we feel ourselves compelled to avail ourselves

of whatever resources lie within our reach. Having been disappointed in several quarters, we are obliged to remind you of the heavy balance we have against you of £1,446 14s. 6d. You must be aware of the length of time during which it has been standing; and trust you will forgive us if we at length apprise you that it is absolutely impossible for us to allow of any more delay. Unless, therefore, the whole of the above balance, or at least £1,000 of it, be paid within three days of the date hereof, we regret to inform you we have finally made up our minds to let the law take its usual course. We feel the less hesitation in saying thus much, because we are persuaded that, with a little exertion, you might long ago have liquidated this heavy balance, or the greater part thereof." (Mr. Gammon wrote as nearly in the peculiar style of Mr. Quirk as he could.) "In writing thus, Messrs. Quirk and Snap feel it only due to their partner, Mr. Gammon, to add that he is no party to this application. Messrs. Q. and S. have felt, however, in making it, that the interests of the firm have already suffered long enough through their deference to the personal wishes and feelings of *one* of the members of the firm; and but for whom their heavy balance would have been called for long ago, and, no doubt, in due course discharged. We regret being unable to vary or depart from the determination above expressed; and most sincerely hope your resources are of that nature that we shall be spared the unpleasantness of letting the law take its usual course. And we remain, dear sir, Yours most respectfully,

"QUIRK, GAMMON, & SNAP.

"CHARLES AUBREY, Esquire,
"Vivian Street."

Exactly on the seventh day from that on which Mr. Gammon had made his ill-omened advances towards Miss Aubrey did the above dreadful and heartless letter reach its destination—being delivered into Mr. Aubrey's hands while he was intently perusing a very heavy set of papers, which, at his request, Mr. Weasel had allowed him to take home. The painful scene which ensued I shall spare the reader—only mentioning that poor Miss Aubrey became almost frantic, treating herself as the sole occasion of this disaster. That very morning, at breakfast, had he been talking of selling out, of their precious remnant in the funds, the sum of £105, to enable him to become a pupil with Mr. Crystal—at the suggestion of the Attorney-General.

What was to be done in this fearful emergency, none of them knew—except consenting to an immediate sale of all their plate, books, and furniture. Their affliction, indeed, knew no bounds. Even Mr. Aubrey, though for a long time he bore up heroically, was at length overcome by the agonies of the dear beings whose ruin was involved in his own.

Had not Gammon been prompt in his vengeance? So thought they all.

What *was* to be done? A word will suffice to explain Mr. Aubrey's position fully. It will be recollected, that about a twelvemonth before, he had been left in possession of a balance of £1,063, after paying the sum of £4,000 to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, Messrs. Runnington, and Mr. Parkinson, in the way which has been already mentioned. Since then, he had realized the sum of £150 by his contributions to literary journals; and by means of a severe and systematic economy, this sum, together with about £200 taken from his store of £1,063, had sufficed to cover their whole year's expenditure.

Alas! misfortune followed him like a bloodhound, let him turn his steps whithersoever he might! Naturally anxious to make the most of his little store of £1,063, so long as any considerable portion of it could be spared from their immediate personal necessities, he looked about in all directions for some safe and profitable investment, which might produce him a little more income than can be derived from the funds. He cautiously avoided having the slightest

connection with any of the innumerable joint-stock speculations then afloat, and of which he saw distinctly the mischievous and ruinous tendency; and this, moreover, in spite of the artful occasional representations of Mr. Gammon. Having consulted his banker, and also a member of the House of Commons—one of the city members—a man of immense wealth, and great mercantile experience and sagacity, and with whom he had been intimate while in the House—confirmed by their approval, and also that of Mr. Weasel and Messrs. Runnington, all of whom poor Aubrey anxiously consulted concerning the disposal of this his little all; about six weeks after the period of his settlement with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, he invested five hundred pounds in the purchase of a particular foreign stock. Safe and promising as it appeared, however, at the very moment when it was in the highest repute with capitalists of all descriptions both at home and abroad—from scarce any assignable reason, but for one of the many unaccountable instances of fluctuation to which property of that kind is proverbially liable—Aubrey had hardly held his scrip for a month, when—alas!—to his dismay, he found the stock falling—falling—falling—down, down, down, it went, till his scrip was so much waste paper! His loss was irretrievable. The wealthy member whom he had consulted, lost nearly one hundred and twenty thousand pounds, and was driven to the very verge of ruin. Mr. Weasel even—caution personified, in dealing with the little accumulation of his hard earnings—lost upwards of a thousand pounds; and Mr. Runnington about double that sum.

This catastrophe—for surely such it was—had left him a sum of about £350 only in the funds, and in his banker's hands a little balance of some fifty or sixty pounds to meet his current expenses. The above sum, at the time when Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's letter reached him, had been necessarily diminished to about £290; this was all the money he had in the world to save himself, and those dependent on him, from absolute destitution. Yet he was now peremptorily called upon, within three days' time, to pay the sum of £1,446 14s. 6d.

He hurried off, early the next morning, in consternation, to Messrs. Runnington. Mr. Runnington, with a heavy heart and a gloomy countenance, set off instantly, alone, to the office of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. He saw Mr. Gammon, who told him, with a well-dissembled air of disgust, to go in to Mr. Quirk, or Mr. Snap. He did so, and found them inexorable. Mr. Quirk doggedly told Mr. Runnington that he had been out of pocket long enough, and would not be fooled by one of his own partners any longer. Mr. Runnington quitted them, fairly at his wits' end; and on his return, told Mr. Aubrey, whom he had left at his office, that he had done, and could do, "nothing with the vultures of Saffron Hill." Mr. Runnington felt that his unhappy client, Mr. Aubrey, was far too critically situated with respect to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, to admit of his threatening, on Mr. Aubrey's behalf, to refer their exorbitant and monstrous bill to taxation, he knew not, in fact, what suggestion to offer—what scheme to devise—to extricate Mr. Aubrey from his present dreadful dilemma. As for applying for pecuniary assistance from friends, Mr. Aubrey's soul revolted at the bare thought. What—borrow! Overwhelmed as he already was, it would be indeed grossly unprincipled! Was not one alone of his generous friends at that moment under a liability on his behalf of more than ten thousand pounds? No: with gloomy composure he felt that, at last, *his hour was come*; that a prison wall must soon intervene between him—poor broken-hearted soul!—and the dear beloved beings from whom, as yet, he had never been once separated—no! not for one moment deprived of blessed intercourse and communion with them—his wife—Kate—his unconscious little children.

Kate, however, got desperate; and, unknown to her brother, though with

the full privacy of his weeping wife, wrote off a long—a heartrending letter to good old Lady Stratton, whose god-daughter she was, telling her everything. Kate was up half the night writing that letter, and it was blistered with her tears. She took it very early in the morning, herself, to the post office, and she and Mrs. Aubrey awaited the issue with the most trembling and fearful solicitude.

Old Lady Stratton had been for some months in very feeble health, and the receipt of Kate's letter occasioned her infinite distress. It will be remembered that she had long before effected a policy of insurance upon her life for £15,000, always intending to bequeath it as a little portion to poor Kate. She had many months before given the necessary instructions to her solicitor, Mr. Parkinson of Grilston, for making her will, so as to carry into effect her kind intentions towards Kate; bequeathing also legacies of £500 a-piece to each of Mr. Aubrey's little children. How it came to pass, however, I scarcely know—except by referring it to that sad superstitious weakness which makes people often procrastinate the execution of so all-important an instrument as a will; but, at the time when Kate's letter arrived, her ladyship's will had not been executed, but still lay, merely in draft, at Mr. Parkinson's office. Feeling greatly indisposed, however, shortly after she had received Miss Aubrey's letter, she sent off an express to Mr. Parkinson to attend with her will; and a few minutes afterwards, her attendants found it necessary to send off another express for her physician, Dr. Goddard. Before drawing a cheque for the sum of £700 or £800, which she intended instantly to place at Mr. Aubrey's disposal, she awaited Mr. Parkinson's return that he might inform her of the exact balance then at her banker's. He was absent from Grilston when the express arrived; but he was followed, and about seven o'clock that evening entered Lady Stratton's residence, carrying with him the draft of her will, ready prepared for execution. His chief clerk also accompanied him, lest, by any possibility, a *witness* should be wanting. The countenances of the domestics warned him that there was not one moment to be lost; and he hastened at once into Lady Stratton's bed-chamber. There she lay, venerable old lady, propped up by pillows—her long white hair partially visible from under her cap. A hasty whisper from Dr. Goddard apprised him of the very critical situation of Lady Stratton. Writing materials stood ready prepared in the room against Mr. Parkinson's arrival. She recognized him on his passing the foot of the bed, and in a feeble voice whispered—“*My will!—My will!*”

[“Oh, hasten! delay not an instant, Mr. Parkinson! If you do but know what depends on your movements—could you but at this instant—oh me!—could you but catch a glimpse of the scene this instant passing in Vivian Street!—Give her the pen, Mr. Parkinson—guide her hand—place it upon the paper.”]

But it was too late. Before the pen could be placed within her fingers, those fingers had become incapable of holding it—for Lady Stratton at that moment experienced the paralytic seizure which Dr. Goddard had been dreading for three or four hours before! Alas, alas! 'twas all useless: pen, ink, and paper were removed. She lingered till about nine o'clock the next morning, when, in the presence of Mr. Parkinson, who had not quitted the room for one instant, death released the venerable sufferer. She had thus died *intestate*; and all her personal property—Lady Stratton had none other—became the property of her ladyship's next of kin. Had this event happened but two years before, that next of kin would have been—Mr. Aubrey; but now—will the reader have patience to read it?—that next of kin was—Tittlebat Titmouse! Alas! there could be no question about the matter; and it was the knowledge of that contingency which had distracted Mr. Parkinson from the moment that he received his last ineffectual summons to the bedside of Lady Stratton. Yes, Mr. Titmouse had now become entitled to all

the goods, chattels, credits, and effects which were of the late Lady Stratton; and before she had been laid in Yatton churchyard, not far from her beloved friend who had preceded her by a few months only—Mrs. Aubrey—Mr. Parkinson received a letter from Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, as the solicitors of Mr. Titmouse, giving him formal notice of the title of their client, and requesting Mr. Parkinson to lose no time in making an inventory of the effects of her ladyship, to whom Mr. Titmouse intended to administer immediately. Mr. Gammon himself went down, and arrived the day after the funeral. Guess his excitement on discovering the windfall which came to his client, Mr. Titmouse, in the policy of £15,000, the existence of which they had, of course, never dreamed of!

But there was another discovery, which occasioned him not a little excitement, as his flushed cheek and suspended breath testified—alas! poor Aubrey's bond for £2,000, *with interest at five per cent. l*—an instrument which poor Lady Stratton, having always intended to destroy, latterly imagined that she had actually done so. It had, however, got accidentally mingled with other papers, which had found their way, in the ordinary course, to Mr. Parkinson, and who was himself ignorant of its existence, since it lay folded in a letter addressed to Lady Stratton, till it turned up while he was sorting the papers, in obedience to the instructions of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. He turned pale and red by turns, as he held the accursed document in his fingers; probably, thought he, no one on earth but himself knew of its existence; and—but his sense of duty prevailed. Of course the obligee of the bond, and, as such, entitled to the principal money secured by it, together with all arrears of interest which might be due upon it, was now Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse.

Surely, it is hard to imagine a more dismal and wanton freak of fortune than this—as far, at least, as concerned poor Kate Aubrey.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“FLY! FLY!—For God's sake fly! Lose not one moment of the precious respite which, by incredible efforts, I have contrived to secure you—a respite of but a few hours—and wrung from heartlessness and rapacity. In justice, much injured man! to yourself—to all you hold dear upon earth—to the precious interests entrusted to your keeping, and involved in your destruction—again I say *Fly!* Quit the country, if it be but for never so short a time, till you or your friends shall have succeeded in arranging your disordered affairs. Regard this hasty and perhaps incoherent note in what light you please—but I tell you it comes, *in sacred confidence*, from a firm and inalienable friend, whose present desperate exertions in your behalf you will one day perhaps be able to appreciate. Once more I conjure you to fly!—From other and greater dangers than you at present apprehend. *I see the rack preparing for you!*—Will you stay to be tortured?—and in the presence of the incomparable beings who—but my feelings overpower me! Indeed, Mr. Aubrey, if you disregard this note, through weak fears as to its writer's sincerity, or a far weaker and a wild notion of Quixotic honour and heroism—remember, in the moment of being overwhelmed, *this note*—and then, do justice to its writer.—Your faithful, unhappy, *distrusted* friend,

“O. G.

“P.S.—For God's sake burn or otherwise destroy this note, as soon as you shall have read it.”

Such was the letter which found its way into Mr. Aubrey's hands, just as the time which had been fixed by Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, for payment of their bill, was expiring, and which occasioned him, as may be easily imagined, dreadful disquietude. It had found him in a state of the deepest depression—but yet vigorously striving to preserve, in the presence of his wife and sister, a semblance of composure and cheerfulness. More to pacify them than to satisfy himself, he had walked about town during the two preceding days till ready to drop with exhaustion, in fruitless quest of those who might be disposed to advance him a thousand pounds on his own personal security, and on terms he scarce cared how exorbitant, to free him, at all events for a while, from his present exigency. All had been, however, in vain—indeed he had had no hopes from the first. And what was then to be done? Those there were, he well knew, who needed but to be apprised of his circumstances, to step forward and generously relieve him from his difficulties. But where was all that to end? What real good could it serve? Awfully involved as he was already—one, alone, of his friends being at that moment under a liability which must be discharged within a few months, of nearly *eleven thousand pounds*—was he to place others in a similar situation? What earthly prospect had he of ever repaying them? Lamentable as was his position, his soul recoiled from the bare thought. But then came before his anguished eye, his wife—his sister—his children; and he flung himself, in an ecstasy, on his knees, remaining long prostrate—and, for a while, *the heaven that was over his head seemed to be brass, and the earth that was under him iron*. His heart might be wrung, however, and his spirit heavy and darkened; but no extent or depth of misery could cause him to forget those principles of honour and integrity by which all his life had been regulated. He resolved therefore, to submit to the stroke apparently impending over him, with calmness, as to inevitable ruin; nor would he hear of any further applications to his friends, which, indeed, he felt would be only encouragement to those who held him in thralldom, to renew their exactions, when they found each succeeding pressure successful. Poor Kate had told him, as soon as her letter had been put into the post, of her application to Lady Stratton, and told him with trembling apprehension as to the consequences; but did she think her fond, broken-hearted brother could chide her? He looked at her for a moment, with quivering lip and eyes blinded with tears—and then wrung her hand, simply expressing a hope, that, since the step *had* been taken, it might be, in some measure at least, successful.

Mr. Gammon's letter, as I have already intimated, filled Mr. Aubrey with inexpressible alarm. Again and again he read it over with increasing agitation, and at the same time uncertain as to its true character and import. Was he guilty of the duplicity which Mrs. Aubrey and Kate so vehemently imputed to him? Was he actuated by revenge? Or was he, as represented by Mr. Quirk's letter, overpowered by his partners, and still sincere in his wishes to shield Mr. Aubrey from their rapacity? Or was Mr. Gammon suggesting *flight* only as a snare? Was Mr. Aubrey to be seduced into an act warranting them in proceeding to instant extremities against him? What could be the other matters so darkly alluded to in the letter? Were they the two promissory notes of five thousand pounds each, which he had deposited with Mr. Gammon, who at length was peremptorily required by Mr. Titmouse to surrender them up, and permit them to be put in suit? They were payable *on demand*—he shuddered! Might it be, that Titmouse was desperately in want of money, and had therefore overpowered the scruples of Gammon, and disregarded the sacred pledge under which he assured Titmouse the notes had been given? Mr. Aubrey rejoiced that Mr. Gammon's letter had been placed in his hands by the servant when alone in his study, whither he had gone to write a note to Mr. Runnington; and resolved not to apprise Mrs. Aubrey and Kate of

its arrival. The *fourth* day after the receipt of Messrs. Quirk and Snap's letter had now elapsed. Mr. Aubrey did not venture to quit the house. All of them were, as may well be imagined, in a state of pitiable distress, and agitation, and suspense. Thus also passed the *fifth* day—still the blow descended not. Was the arm, extended to inflict it, held back still, by Mr. Gammon continuing thus the "*incredible efforts*" spoken of in his note?

The *sixth* morning dawned on the wretched family. They all rose at a somewhat earlier hour than usual. They could scarce touch the spare and simple breakfast spread before them, nor enjoy—nay they could hardly bear—the prattle and gambols of the lively little ones, Charles and Agnes, whom at length they despatched back again to the nursery; for they were, in the highest possible state of excitement and anxiety, awaiting the arrival of the postman—this being the first morning on which they could, in the ordinary course, receive a letter from Lady Stratton in answer to that of Kate. 'Twas now a little past ten. The breakfast things had been removed; and on hearing the agitating though long expected *rat-tat* of the postman a few doors down the street, Mrs. Aubrey and Kate started to the window. Their hearts beat violently when their eye at length caught sight of him, with his arm full of letters, knocking at the door opposite. Oh, had he a letter for *them*? How long were their opposite neighbours in answering his summons, and in paying the postage! Then he stood for nearly a minute laughing with a servant in the adjoining area—intolerable indeed was all this to the agitated beings who were thus panting for his arrival! Then he glanced at his letters, and taking one in his hand, crossed the street, making for their door.

"Heavens! He has a letter!" cried Miss Aubrey, excitedly—"I sha'n't wait for Fanny!" and, flying to the front door, plucked it open the instant after the postman had knocked. He touched his hat on seeing, instead of a servant, the beautiful but agitated lady, who stretched forth her hand and took the letter, exclaiming, "Fanny will pay you"—but in an instant her cheek was blanched, and she nearly fell to the floor, at sight of the black border, the black seal, and the handwriting, which she did not at the instant recognize. For a moment or two she seemed to have lost the power of speech or motion; but presently bent her trembling steps into the parlour. "Oh! Charles—Agnes—I feel as if I were going to *die*—look"—she faltered, sinking into the nearest chair, while Mr. Aubrey, with much agitation, took the ominous-looking letter which she extended towards him. 'Twas from Mr. Parkinson; and told the news of Lady Stratton's death, and the lamentable circumstances attending it; that—as the reader has heard—she died intestate—and that Mr. Titmouse had, as next of kin, become entitled to all she had left behind her. "My God!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, on having glanced over them. "She is dead!" said he in a low tone, at the same time giving Kate the letter, and hastening to Mrs. Aubrey, who seemed nearly fainting. Each had uttered a faint scream on hearing his words. Mrs. Aubrey had swooned in his arms—and Kate sat like a statue, without even glancing at the fatal letter which she held in her hand, but gazing in a sort of stupor at her brother. She was unable to rise to Mrs. Aubrey's assistance—of whose state, indeed, she appeared, from her vacant eye, to be hardly aware. At length a slight sigh announced the returning consciousness of Mrs. Aubrey; and at the same time Miss Aubrey, with a manifestly desperate effort, regained her consciousness, and with a cheek white as the letter she was looking at, read it over.

"This is very—very—dreadful—Heaven is forsaking us!" at length she murmured, gazing woefully at her brother and sister.

"Say not so—but rather God's will be done," faltered Mr. Aubrey, his voice and his countenance evincing the depth of his affliction. "God help us!" he added in a tone, which at length, thrilling through the overcharged heart of

his sister, caused her to weep bitterly ; and if ever there was a mournful scene, it was that which ensued, ere this doomed family, slowly recovering from the first stunning effects of the shock which they had just received, had become aware of the full extent of their misery. They had ever felt towards Lady Stratton—who, as has been already said, had been poor Kate's godmother—as towards a parent ; and their affection had been doubled after the death of Mrs. Aubrey. Now she was *gone* ; she who would have stood for at least a little while between them and ruin, was gone ! And by an inscrutable and awful Providence, that which she had sacredly destined to them—and which would have effectually shielded them from the cruelty and rapacity of their enemies—had been diverted from them into the coffers of the most selfish and worthless of mankind—who seemed, indeed, as if he had been called into existence only to effect their ruin ; even, as it were, *the messenger of Satan to buffet them* ! At length, however, the first natural transports of their grief having subsided, their stricken hearts returned to their allegiance towards Heaven ; and Mr. Aubrey, whose constancy at once strengthened and encouraged his partners in affliction, with many just and pious reflections reminded them that they were in the hands of God, who intended all earthly suffering—however unaccountable—however harsh and apparently undeserved its infliction—to contribute infallibly to the ultimate benefit of his children.

Out of respect to the memory of their dear, venerable departed friend, they drew down all the blinds of their little house, thereby spreading around them a gloom similar to that within. A sad, a mournful little group they looked ! Towards the close of the day their souls were subdued into resignation to the will of the all wise Disposer of events : they had, in some measure, realized the consolations of an enlightened and scriptural piety.

They met the next morning, at breakfast, with a melancholy composure. The blinds being drawn down, prevented the bright sunshine out of doors from entering into the little room where their frugal breakfast was spread, and where prevailed a gloom more in unison with their saddened feelings. To all who sat round the table, except little Charles, the repast was slight indeed : he had shortly before begun to breakfast downstairs, instead of in the nursery ; and, merry little being ! was rattling away cheerfully, as if nothing could disturb the lightheartedness of childhood. They all started on hearing the unexpected knock of the general postman. He had brought them a letter from Dr. Tatham ; who, it seemed, was aware of the letter which had been the day before dispatched to them by Mr. Parkinson. The little Doctor's letter was exceedingly touching and beautiful ; and it was a good while before they could complete its perusal, owing to the emotion which it occasioned them. 'Twas indeed full of tender sympathy—of instructive incentives to resignation to the will of God.

"Heaven is speaking to us through one of its ministers in this letter ! Let us listen in reverent humility !" They remained silent for some moments, Mr. Aubrey re-perusing the long and closely-written letter of which he had been speaking. Presently he heard a knock at the street door—an ordinary single knock—such as was by no means unusual at that period of the morning ; yet, he scarce knew why, it disconcerted him. He kept, however, his eye upon the letter, while he heard Fanny opening the door—then a word or two whispered—after which the parlour door was hastily opened, and Fanny stood there, pale as death, and unable, evidently from fright, to speak—a heavy step was heard in the passage—and then there stood behind the terror-stricken girl a tall stout man in a drab great-coat, with a slouched hat, and a thick walking-stick in his hand—looking over her shoulder into the parlour, whose dismayed occupants soon shared the panic of poor Fanny.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said he, civilly, advancing into the room, and

removing his hat—"is your name Charles Aubrey?" "It is, sir," said Mr. Aubrey, rising from his chair—by which time a second man was standing at the door. "You're my prisoner, sir," said the man, stepping close up to the wretched Aubrey, and touching him on the shoulder, at the same time holding out a thin slip of paper—the warrant by virtue of which he was then acting. The moment that he advanced towards Mr. Aubrey a dreadful shriek burst from Mrs. Aubrey and Kate, who sprang forward, and threw their arms wildly round him. He implored them to restrain their feelings—though evidently greatly agitated himself.

"Will you let me look at your warrant?" said he mildly to the man who had arrested him, and remained standing close beside him. Mr. Aubrey, glancing over the warrant, saw that he was arrested for fourteen hundred pounds and upwards, at the suit of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap.

"You see, sir, it's only my duty to do this here," said the officer respectfully, evidently touched by the agony of the two beautiful women who still clung wildly round one about to be torn ruthlessly from their arms;—"don't take on so, ladies—there's no great harm done yet."

"For mercy's sake, Agnes! Kate! as you love me!—Be calm! You afflict me beyond measure," said Mr. Aubrey, who, though he had grown very pale, yet preserved under the circumstances a remarkable degree of self-possession. 'Twas, however, a scene which he had been endeavouring to realize to himself, and prepare for daily, if not hourly, for the last week.

"Oh mercy! mercy! for God's sake have mercy on him! On us!"—exclaimed Mrs. Aubrey and Kate.

"Oh, good men! kind men!—have mercy!" cried Kate desperately—"What are you going to do with him?" "No harm, miss, you may depend on't—only he *must* go with us, seeing we're *obligated* to take him."

"For Heaven's sake, don't—don't, for mercy's sake!"—cried Kate, turning her agonized face towards the man—her hair partially dishevelled, and her arms still clasping her brother with frantic energy. Mrs. Aubrey had swooned, and lay insensible in her husband's arms, supported by his knee; while Fanny, herself half-distracted, was striving to restore her by rubbing her cold hands.

"Lord, ladies! don't—don't take on in this here way—you're only a-hurting of yourselves, and you don't do the gentleman any good, you know—'cause, in course, he's all the sorrier for going," said the second man, who had by this time entered the room, and stood looking on concernedly. But Miss Aubrey repeated her inquiries with wild and frantic impetuosity, for some time not aware that Mrs. Aubrey lay insensible beside her. The two men stood by, grasping their huge walking-sticks, and their hats, in silence. At length Mrs. Aubrey showed symptoms of recovery—uttering a long deep sigh.

"I say—master," at length whispered the follower, "I'll tell you what it is—this here seems a bad business, don't it?" "Jemmy, Jemmy! You a'n't got half the pluck of a *bum*!—There's nothing in all this when one's used to it, as I am." "P'r'aps the gemman don't rightly owe the money, after all." "Don't he? And *they've* sworn he *does*!—Come, come, Jem, no chaffing!—The sooner (I'm thinking) we have him off from all this here blubbering, the better."

"Bless'd if ever I see'd two such beautiful women afore. I don't half like it; I wished we'd nabbed him in the street—and"—he lowered his whisper—"if there's *much* o' this here sort o' work to be done, I've had enough of being a *bum* already, an' 'll go back to my business again, bad as it is."

"Kind—good men!" said Kate, approaching them, and speaking with forced calmness—pushing aside her disordered hair from her pale cheeks, "Can't you leave him here—only a day longer?" "Can't, miss—it's quite *unpossible*; it's not to be done for no money short of debt and costs," said the officer respectfully, but rather doggedly—as if he were getting tired of the scene—"one

would think we were a-goin' to murder the gemman ! Once for all, if so be as he will only go, as a gemman should, to my little place in Chancery-Lane—(my name's Grab, miss, at your service, and there a'n't a better conducted lock-up nor mine in London, I assure you, nor where debtors is more comfortably looked arter)—he's no need to be there above a day or two—it may be less—and of course his friends will come and bail him out ; so *don't* be a-going on so when it's no manner o' use !”

“Charles ! My love !” murmured Mrs. Aubrey faintly—“they surely will never separate us ? Oh ! let us go together ; I don't care where we go to, so long as I am with you.”

“Do not ask it, my darling ! my heart's love !” replied Mr. Aubrey tenderly, as he supported her in his arm, and against his knee—and a tear fell from his eye upon her cheek—“I shall be exposed to but little inconvenience, I am certain ; there can be no violence or insult offered me so long as I submit myself peaceably to the laws ! And I shall soon, please God, be back !” “Oh, Charles ! I shall die—I shall never survive seeing you carried away !”—she was becoming increasingly vehement. “Agnes, Agnes !” said her husband reprovingly, “the mother must not desert her children ; my heart will ache every moment that I am absent, if I think that my dear little ones have not a mother's protection.” “Kate will take care of them, love !” said Mrs. Aubrey faintly ; and her husband tenderly kissed her forehead.

While this hurried colloquy between the wretched couple was proceeding, Kate was talking in low but impassioned tones to the two officers, who listened to her respectfully, but shook their heads.

“No, miss—it *can't* be ; it can't indeed.” “But you shall have *everything* in the house for your security—I have still a good many handsome dresses ; jewels all—all ; surely they will fetch *something* ; and then there's plate, and books, and furniture—you can't think Mr. Aubrey's going basely to run away !——” “If, as how, miss (you see), it was only ourselves that you had to do with—(but, Lord love you, miss ! we're only officers, and has our duty to do, and *must* do it !)—why, we'd go a little out of our way for to oblige a lady ; but the people you must go to is the gemmen whose names is here,” pointing to the warrant ; “they're the people as the money's owing to—Quirk, Gamm—”

“Don't name them ! They are fiends ! They are villains ! They are robbing, then ruining, my wretched brother !” exclaimed Miss Aubrey with dreadful vehemence.

“Kate, Kate !” cried Mr. Aubrey, kindly but peremptorily—“in mercy to me, be silent ! Restrain your feelings, or really I must hasten my departure.”

“Oh, Charles !” faltered Miss Aubrey, sinking down on a chair exhausted, and burying her face in her handkerchief.

“Now, sir—if *you* please,” commenced Grab, turning to Mr. Aubrey, “we must be thinking of going, seeing, I expect, I've another job on hand to-day ; would you prefer coaching or walking it ? Excuse me, sir—I've seen many such things as this ; and I know it's only a haggrawating of your feelings to be stopping here—the longer the worse ! What must be, had better be done at once, and got over with. I've been a-telling this here young lady a many times, that it's no use fretting—and that in course you'll be soon back again, when you've done what's needful ; so hadn't my man here better go and get a coach ?”

“It is so, indeed !” exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, with a profound sigh—and endeavoured for some time, by all the means in his power, to soothe and pacify his wretched companions.

“Can I speak a word with you alone, before I go ?” he presently inquired of the officer. “In course, sir,” replied Grab ; and, promising to return within a minute or two's time, Mr. Aubrey quitted the room with Grab close at his heels ; and presently they were both standing in his little study.

"Betwixt ourselves, sir," quoth Grab, in a confidential tone, "you've *rather* keen hands to deal with ;" here he laid his finger along his nose, and winked his eye—"and you'll lose no time in turning yourself about. You understand, sir?" "Perfectly," replied Mr. Aubrey with a sigh. "Who gave you your instructions in this matter?" "Mr. Snap—the junior partner—it was him that brought this here warrant to me—" "Are you sure? Was it not Mr. Gammon?" "No, sir—Snap—Snap; that little cockatoo of a chap. Mr. Gammon called at my office half an hour afterwards, to be sure—" "I thought so," interrupted Mr. Aubrey quickly, his face flushing, and feeling relieved from a vast pressure.

"Ay," continued Grab, phlegmatically, "*he'll* see you don't come to much harm in this matter—" "What do you mean?" inquired Mr. Aubrey surprisedly. "Lord! I could tell by his way. He called to say that, since they had resolved to go agin you, he hoped we'd show you every attention, and deal easy by you—" "Indeed!" "Ay—indeed! And I think he said it was a cruel business—nay, I'm *sure* he did; and that, as for him, he washed his hands on't!" Mr. Aubrey seemed confounded.

"I don't somehow think him and his partners are on the best of terms together—but that's no business o' mine, you know, sir! And now, sir, excuse me, but we must be jogging."

"But, my friend, is there really no way," inquired Mr. Aubrey, with manifest perturbation, "by which I can delay accompanying you for a few hours—" "Oh can't, sir—*unpossible*!" "You can remain in possession here—I will be in your custody—I have a little plate, books, and furniture, which would surely stand sufficient security—" "It's no use, sir! go you must—and that without much longer shilly shallying. It's no use!"

Aubrey seemed for a moment overpowered by his emotions. "I fear, myself, that there is no alternative," said he; "but it will almost break the hearts of those ladies—one of whom is my wife—" His voice faltered.

"You take my advice, sir! Let my man start off for a coach—you have a shirt or two put up, and an amusing book—or a bit of a cribbage-board, or a pack of cards, if they're at hand—and give 'em the slip; I assure you it's much the best way; and when you're once out o' the house, they'll come to, and make up their minds to it—never fear 'em."

"Send, then, for a coach—delay, I see, is worse than useless," said he hastily, hearing steps approaching the study door, which was thrust open, and Mrs. Aubrey and Miss Aubrey entered, unable any longer to endure his absence—and as if fearful lest, in mercy to them, he should be contriving to leave them secretly. Grab, having dispatched his follower for a coach, at Mr. Aubrey's earnest request to be left alone for a few minutes, withdrew—but first cast a keen, scrutinizing eye at the window and the chimney—and then, having closed the door, stood outside, in a position which commanded both door and window.

"Now, my sweet Agnes! my sweet Kate!" commenced Aubrey, in a low, earnest tone, having bolted the door to secure themselves from interruption during the few precious moments which remained to them before the arrival of the coach—"I must, within a very few minutes, leave you! Remember—remember, loves!—I am unfortunate, but I am not disgraced!—I look on this as a dispensation of Providence—a wise and good Providence; let us all learn submission—resignation! Whether or not we are really the victims of treachery and hypocrisy, I am unable at present to tell; but let us learn to bear this last crowning indignity with the fortitude of Christians!—relying on it, that God will overrule the most trying and disastrous events for our good! Kneel down! Let us bow before the throne of Heaven, and supplicate its blessing and support, in this our greatest extremity!" He said this calmly; but his

face was deadly pale, and his voice faltered—while they clung round him and heaved convulsive sobs, as they, half unconsciously, sunk on their knees with him. Mr. Aubrey proceeded to make some little preparations for his departure—putting a five-pound note into his pocket—and leaving but little more behind him; and the servant being summoned into the room, was despatched to put up a change of linen for him. He then implored and conjured them, as they loved him, to struggle against their feelings;—and to rely upon his pledge to send them, within two hours at the farthest, intelligence of his movements—assuring them of his confident belief, that in less than twenty-four hours he should have returned to them. While he was speaking in this strain, Mrs. Aubrey suddenly quitted the room, and after a moment's absence returned, her agitated countenance overspread with a mild smile of delight, as she exclaimed, “There, love! Dearest Charles! He says there is no harm in the world in going with you in the coach—and, indeed, we may have rooms to ourselves!”

“My sweet Agnes——”

“I will—I *will* go with you, Charles! Nothing shall prevent me—even if I leave you at the door of the place you are going to!” It was in vain for Mr. Aubrey to protest—her impassioned importunities were irresistible, and she rushed breathlessly upstairs to prepare her dress to accompany him on his brief but melancholy journey. Within a very few minutes she returned, just as the sound of the coach wheels approaching the door was heard. Mr. Aubrey and Kate perceived the dangerous excitement under which she was labouring, and dreaded its effects: yet what could be done! He could not prolong his stay—and it would be infinitely more dangerous to leave her behind, now that she had set her heart upon accompanying him than to permit her to go with them. She carried down little Agnes in her arms—and had been almost suffocating her and little Charles, who walked after her, with kisses and convulsive embraces. Both the children were crying; and as soon as Mrs. Aubrey had reached the parlour door, and heard the coach steps letting down, she fell into violent hysterics.

“I’ll tell you what sir,” whispered Grab, as he stood close beside Mr. Aubrey, who was supporting Mrs. Aubrey—“it wouldn’t be amiss if I was to say you should come along with me at once while this poor lady’s insensible—and then when she’d have come to herself, and know’d you was *gone*, and no mistake—why—she’d in course think no more of it—”

“Oh! for God’s sake—for God’s sake! Remember your promise!” cried Aubrey, and in a voice which nearly reached the officer’s heart: as it was, he simply shrugged his shoulders, and awaited the issue with no little impatience, but in silence. ’Twas in the midst of this heartrending scene, which ensued during the next half-hour, that Kate displayed the strength of character which so remarkably distinguished her: and completely mastering her own agitated feelings, she essentially contributed towards Mrs. Aubrey’s restoration to a state which would admit of her at length setting off. The children had been removed—Mr. Aubrey having bid them an agonizing adieu; for he knew not what accident or contrivance might occur to prevent his return to them—and after embracing his weeping sister, he supported Mrs. Aubrey, Grab closely following them, into the coach. All three having got in, “Jem,” as he was called, shut up the door, and jumping up on to the coach-box, they drove away. Poor Mrs. Aubrey on taking her seat, drew from before her agitated yet beautiful countenance the long dark veil which she had drawn down while passing from the house into the coach, and gazed at Mr. Aubrey with such an expression of mingled tenderness and agony, as was almost sufficient to have broken even the stony heart of Grab. She also held her husband’s hand convulsively grasped within her own—as though fearful of their being even

yet violently separated from each other. As they went along, in answer to Aubrey's anxious inquiries concerning the nature of the scenes which awaited him, Mr. Grab told him that his—Grab's—lock-up was in Chancery-Lane, and would be found as comfortable a place as need be. He informed his prisoner, further, that he might have his choice,—whether to occupy a private room, with a bed-room opening into it—or go into the public room, where would be also some dozen other debtors,—and in which case, of course, Mrs. Aubrey must return home alone. Mr. Aubrey inquired what would be the expense of the private room, and was horrified on hearing—two guineas and a half a day, paid in advance!—exclusive of board and attendance, which doubtless would be charged for on a commensurate scale. The prisoner and his wife gazed at each other in silence, and felt sick at heart.

"The smallest room—at the very top of the house—would suffice for both a sitting-room and a bed-room," said Aubrey—"and we do not care a straw for furniture——"

"The room I told you of, or the public room, is all I've to offer you," replied Grab, somewhat doggedly—"and you needn't cry out before you're hurt; for it may be your friends will bail you out before the night—before much harm's done!" Sick at heart his wretched companions continued silent for the remainder of the journey, till the coach drew up opposite the door of the house of which they had been speaking. It was about half-way up Chancery-Lane, on the right hand side as you entered from the Strand. 'Twas a small, narrow, dingy-looking house, at the corner of a miserable court. The solitary window, level with the door, was strongly secured within by thick perpendicular iron bars. The outer door, at the top of a flight of about a dozen well-worn steps, stood open, leaving exposed to view an inner door, at about a couple of yards' distance from the outer one; and on this inner door was a brass plate bearing the terrifying name—"Grab."

The upper part of the door was of glass, and secured from within, like the window, by strong iron bars. Aubrey's soul sank within him as his eye took in these various points of the dismal building he was thus compelled to enter. The follower, immediately on the coach drawing up, jumped down, and running up the steps of the house, knocked at the inner door, and hurrying back, opened the coach-door, and let down the steps.

"Now, Jarvey—what's the damage?" inquired Grab, before any of them got out.

"Six shillings, your honour."

"You must tip, sir," quoth Grab to Mr. Aubrey—who thereupon counted out all the silver he had, except one solitary sixpence, and they descended, followed up the steps of the house closely by Grab. Their hearts failed them as they heard the sound of heavy jingling keys from within opening the door; and the next moment they withstood in a short, narrow, and dark passage—the sallow ill-looking man who had opened the door instantly closing, barring, and locking it upon them.

"This here's the public room," quoth Grab, with the confident air of a man who feels in his own house; and, half-opening a door on his left—they caught a glimpse of a number of men—some smoking; others sitting with their feet on the table, reading the newspapers; others playing at cards; and almost all of them drinking, and either laughing, talking, or singing.

"Now, sir—does this *here* suit your fancy?" inquired Grab, rather sharply. Mr. Aubrey felt his wife leaning heavily on his arm. "Mercy! I shall faint! I feel choked!"—she whispered.

"Show us instantly up-stairs, to your private room—cost what it may," said Mr. Aubrey hastily. "It's only fair to tell you, sir, you pay in advance—and for the whole day, though you should be out again in a quarter of an hour's

time—it's the rule of the house." "Show us upstairs, sir, without delay," said Mr. Aubrey peremptorily.

"Jemmy—show 'em up!" exclaimed Grab briskly—on which Jem went forward, followed by Mr. Aubrey, almost entirely supporting Mrs. Aubrey—who appeared very faint—up the narrow and angular staircase. This led them into a tolerably well-furnished room: and Mrs. Aubrey, on entering it, sank exhausted on the sofa. Here, again, the two windows were strongly secured with iron bars, which gave a peculiarly miserable appearance to the room. The unhappy couple gazed around them for a moment, in silence.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said Grab, entering the room—"but must trouble you for *two, twelve, six*; always pay in advance, as I told you a-coming."

Aubrey involuntarily shuddering, took out his pocket-book—Mrs. Aubrey bursting into tears—and handed to Grab the only money he had—his five-pound note, requesting change.

"The lady would, perhaps, like a glass of negus?" inquired Grab. "Certainly—bring up immediately a glass of cold sherry and water," replied Aubrey. "That will be just *two, five, six* to bring back—shall have it directly, sir—change and all. Here's your bed-room, sir," he added—opening a small door opposite the window—and then withdrew by that through which they had entered. When he had withdrawn, leaving them alone, Aubrey folded his arms tenderly around his wife, and kissed her cold pale cheek, and then helped her to remove her bonnet, which, with its heavy black veil, evidently oppressed her. Her rich dark hair fell disordered over her tippet; and with her flushed cheek, and restless eye, would have given the beholder a vivid picture of beauty and virtue in distress.

"Do promise me, Charles!" said she, looking fondly at him, "that I may go with you, wherever they will allow you to take me?" "I trust, Agnes, that I shall be at large again before long. This is really a comfortable room," he added, evading her question. "If only Kate and the children were here," she replied, tremulously. "Poor things! I wonder what they are doing just now!—Kate will break her heart, poor girl, if we don't return soon!" "Never fear, Agnes! But let us look what kind of bed-room they have given us. I hope we shall have no occasion, however, to occupy it. Come, let us see!"

'Twas very small and close, to be sure, and had but one narrow window, secured, like all the others, by strong iron bars. It overlooked a little flagged yard, about fourteen feet square, surrounded on all sides by high walls, portions of adjoining houses. It was here that the prisoners "*took the air*," and their escape was effectually prevented by close and strong bars of iron passing from side to side, at about ten feet distance from the ground. They looked down, and beheld two or three men sitting and standing beneath, who looked more like animals caged in a menagerie than mere human beings. 'Twas to Aubrey a sickening sight, and he turned from the window, and they both re-entered the front room as Grab returned with the sherry and water, and the change, which he told down on the table. He then asked what they would like to have for dinner—cutlets, steaks, or chops—as he wished to know before Mrs. Grab went out "to order the house dinner." They seemed, however, to loathe the idea of eating, not a little to the annoyance of their truly hospitable host, Aubrey earnestly begging him to send off a message instantly, with his card, to Mr. Runnington.

"A couple of shillings for the man, sir," said Grab; and, having received it, withdrew, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey to themselves for nearly an hour and a half; at the end of which period, their hearts leaped for joy to see Mr. Runnington enter the room, with a countenance full of concern and sympathy.

"Well, but you shall not be much longer in this hateful hole, at any rate,"

said he, after some half-hour's anxious conversation with them; and ringing the bell, directed the man to send Grab upstairs, and to fetch pen, ink, and paper. In a few minutes Grab appeared. "You've no objection I suppose, Grab, to discharge Mr. Aubrey on my undertaking?"

"In course not, sir," replied Grab readily; but he was a good deal disappointed at so abrupt a close to his exactions. Mr. Runnington sat down and began to write. "You had better send off to the office, and see if there's anything else there," he added (meaning that Grab should search, as he was bound to do, for any other writs against Mr. Aubrey which might be lodged with the sheriff, before discharging his prisoner out of custody).

"You don't apprehend anything *there*, do you?" inquired Mr. Runnington, rather seriously without taking his eye from the paper on which he was writing. "Heaven only knows! But I *think* not," replied Aubrey.

The following was the undertaking given by Mr. Runnington, and which operated as an instant release of his oppressed and truly persecuted client:—

"Aubrey *ats.* Quirk and others.

"We hereby undertake to procure the execution of a good and sufficient bail-bond herein, for the above-named defendant, in due time.

"RUNNINGTON & Co., Defendant's Attorneys.

"To Mr. Grab,

"Officer to the Sheriff of Middlesex."

With this document lying before them, and awaiting the messenger's return from the sheriff's office, Mr. Runnington and Mr. Aubrey conversed together anxiously on the subject of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's bill. Mr. Aubrey was sufficiently acquainted with the general course of practice to be aware, that beyond requiring him to put in bail to the action (special bail, as it is called), no effectual step could be taken against him for several months to come; *i.e.*, till Michaelmas term in the ensuing *November*, however, eager and active the plaintiffs might be: so that he had an interval of at least four months, in which, as the phrase is, "to turn himself about," and endeavour to discover some mode of extricating himself from his present serious dilemma. After reminding Mr. Aubrey that neither a peer of the realm, nor a member of parliament, nor an attorney, could become bail for him, Mr. Runnington requested the names of two or three confidential friends to whom he might apply to become security for Mr. Aubrey: and as he should be at any time able to exonerate them from liability, by surrendering his person to his creditors, he felt no hesitation in applying to them to perform for him this act of kindness. "By the way," said Mr. Runnington, in the course of their conversation, and with apparent carelessness, "could I say a word or two to you on a little matter of business? And will Mrs. Aubrey excuse us for a moment?" turning towards her. She bowed, and they withdrew for a moment into the adjoining bedroom.

"Put this into your pocket," said Mr. Runnington, taking out the day's newspaper; "and when you have an opportunity, read the account of what took place yesterday in the Court of King's Bench. It startled *me* not a little, I can tell you; and the reason of my not having been at the office when your messenger arrived was that I not had returned from Vivian Street, whither, and to the Temple, I had gone in search of you. For Heaven's sake don't alarm Mrs. Aubrey or Miss Aubrey; but, if anything occurs to you, do not lose one moment in putting yourself into communication with us. If possible I will call at Vivian Street this evening." With this they returned to the sitting room, nothing in their appearance calculated to alarm Mrs. Aubrey, or even attract her attention.

Shortly afterwards Grab entered the room.

"All right, sir," said he to Mr. Runnington; and added, turning to Mr. Aubrey, "you're no longer in my custody, sir; and I hope you won't be, in a hurry, again!"

Within a few minutes' time they had quitted that dismal scene; they were again apparently free. On first stepping into the bright cheering sunlight, and bustling noisy street, it had a sort of freshness—of novelty—to them. Now they were free to go whithersoever they chose!

It seemed to the Aubreys, as if ten times the real interval had elapsed between their entering and quitting the scene of his incarceration. With what exhilarated spirits they hastened homeward! as if a millstone were no longer suspended from their necks. But Mr. Aubrey suddenly bethought himself of the newspaper given him by Mr. Runnington; and it cost him, indeed, a great effort to assume a cheerfulness so foreign to his feelings.

While, however, they are thus walking homeward, intending, in the event of Mrs. Aubrey becoming fatigued, to take a shilling drive on their way, let me, in order to enable the reader to appreciate the paragraph to which Mr. Runnington had called Aubrey's attention, turn for a while to trace the movements of that master-spirit of evil, Mr. Gammon; for which purpose it will be necessary to take up the history from the evening of the day in which Mr. Aubrey had called at Mr. Gammon's chambers, to forbid him visiting any longer at Vivian Street. By that time, Mr. Gammon had thoroughly thought out his plan of operations. What had passed between him and Miss Aubrey and her brother satisfied him that the time for calling into action all his forces had arrived; and the exact end he proposed to himself was to plunge Mr. Aubrey at once into apparently inextricable and hopeless difficulty—into total ruin—so as to render them all more accessible to Mr. Gammon's advances and to force Miss Aubrey into entertaining his addresses, as the sole means of effecting her brother's liberation. For this purpose, it would be necessary to make him debtor to so large an amount as would preclude the interference of even the most liberally disposed of his friends. Those might very probably go as far as fifteen hundred pounds on his behalf, who could not be brought to think of nearly twelve thousand pounds—it being borne in mind, that one alone of Mr. Aubrey's friends, Lord De la Zouch, was already liable, on his behalf, to some eleven thousand pounds, which would become payable on the ensuing 24th of January. But the mask was not yet to be thrown off: Gammon resolved to appear the firm friend of Mr. Aubrey to the last; deprecating vehemently, and striving to avert from him, the very proceedings which he was all the while, with secret skill and vigour, urging on against him. He determined, therefore, to recall Titmouse's attention to the two promissory notes for £5,000 each; to pretend reluctance to allow them to be put in suit, and yet give him clearly to understand that *he* might do so, without giving mortal offence to Gammon.

At the moment of the reader's being reintroduced to Mr. Gammon, that gentleman was sitting, about nine o'clock in the evening, at his chambers. In one hand he held the rough draft of his rent-charge, which had that day been sent to him by Mr. Frankpledge, and he was occasionally making pencil memoranda on the margin as he went along. He would sometimes pause in his task, as if his thoughts wandered to other subjects; his countenance looked harassed, his brow seemed laden with anxiety. On the sofa lay several piles of loose papers. First, there were the draft briefs—and voluminous they were—which he was now preparing, or rather settling, in the following actions for bribery penalties, coming on for trial at the ensuing Yorkshire Assizes:—

"WIGLEY v. GAMMON (S. J.)" * "WIGLEY v. BLOODSUCK (S. J.)"
 "Same v. MUFLINT (S. J.)" "Same v. WOODLOUSE (S. J.)"

* i. e. "Special Jury."

All these serious actions were being pushed forward with great vigour, at the instance of Lord de la Zouch, who had, moreover, directed them all to be made special jury causes.

Secondly, a monstrous mass of papers, also lying on the sofa, contained the heterogeneous elements, out of which it required a head as clear as Gammon's to draw up a brief for the defence in a very complicated case of *conspiracy*,—"The KING v. MIDDLETON, SNAKE, and OTHERS,"—and which was coming on for trial at the ensuing King's Bench sitting for London; it having been removed, on account of its great difficulty and importance, by *certiorari* from the Old Bailey. It ought to have been by this time prepared; yet Mr. Gammon had scarcely even looked at the papers, though the credit of their office was at stake, as the case had attracted a large share of public attention.

Thirdly, there were scattered about complete masses of papers connected with the various joint-stock companies in which Mr. Gammon was concerned, either openly or secretly—either professionally or as a shareholder; the management of many of them requiring infinite vigilance and tact. These matters, however, and many others which had accumulated upon him, till the bare thoughts of them oppressed and distracted him, he had altogether neglected, occupied as he was by the absorbing pursuit of Miss Aubrey, and the consummation of his schemes and purposes respecting Titmouse and the Yatton property. As if all this had not been sufficient, there was yet another of a totally different description. Gammon was writing a series of very popular and powerful attacks in the *Sunday Flash*, upon a certain Tory ex-Minister—in fact, endeavours to write him down—and this with the privity, and even occasional assistance, of one whom Gammon intended, in due time, to make great use of, as soon as his lordship should have sufficiently committed himself; viz., my Lord Blossom and Box. Now Gammon had for three weeks running disappointed the numerous readers of the *Sunday Flash*, during which period, also, he had been almost baited to death upon the subject by old Quirk, the chief proprietor of the paper; and that very evening, the odious Viper, its editor, had been there, as it were, writhing and hissing about him till he had given a positive pledge to prepare an article against the ensuing Saturday. All these things put together were enough for one strong-headed man to bear up against, and Gammon felt very nearly overwhelmed; and the reader will think it very excusable in Mr. Gammon, that he felt such difficulty in commanding his thoughts even to the interesting task of setting the draft of his own rent-charge on the Yatton property. He was not quite satisfied with the way in which Frankpledge had tinkered up the "*consideration*" shadowed forth in Gammon's instructions, and was just sketching off one compounded of a "certain sum of five thousand pounds of good and lawful money of Great Britain, by the aforesaid Oily Gammon, at or before the execution of these presents, paid to the said Tittlebat Titmouse, and the receipt whereof the said Titmouse acknowledged, and from the same and every part thereof, released and discharged the said Oily Gammon, his heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns" (!!!) And "of the great skill, and exertions and sacrifices of the said Oily Gammon, for and on behalf of the said Tittlebat Titmouse, in the recovery of the Yatton property," etc., etc.

I say he had just finished off this little matter, and was varying one or two of the expressions, when a knock at his door announced the arrival of the intelligent granter of the aforesaid annuity, Mr. Titmouse himself, whose stylish cab was at that moment standing opposite to the entrance to 'Thavies' Inn, in Holborn, having brought him direct from the House of Commons, whither, however, he was to return by eleven o'clock, till which time he had paired off, in order to enable him to come and consult Mr. Gammon on one or two important matters. Poor Titmouse had conceived, since his memor-

able interview with Gammon formerly related, a violent hatred of Mr. Gammon; but which was almost absorbed in his dread of that gentleman. The sudden and serious diminution of his income by Gammon's rent-charge, almost turned his head upside-down, and occasioned a pother in his little bosom, which was all the greater for his being unable to admit any sympathizing friend into his confidence. He had become fidgety and irritable to a degree; his countenance and demeanour troubled and depressed: from all which, the more intimate among his brother senators naturally inferred that he had lost large sums at play, or was harassed by his election expenses; or had quarrelled with his mistress, or been found out by his wife; or been kicked, and dared not call out the aggressor; or that some other such accident, as frequently happens to young gentlemen of fashion, had befallen him. Now, to be candid with the reader, Titmouse certainly *was* getting into rather deep water. Formidable creditors were beginning to look somewhat sternly after him from various quarters; his upholsterer was becoming troublesome; his wine-merchant insisted on at least four hundred pounds on account; Messrs. Jewel and Nicknack were surprised at having received no payment for sundry expensive articles of jewellery and *vertù*. His coach-maker, his tailor, a host of household creditors, were getting very restless: he had a running account of some £600 or £800 at the *Gliddington*, in respect of his parliamentary and other dinners at that fashionable establishment; his yacht was a dreadful drain upon him; he had been unfortunate in his sporting speculations; in short, if Gammon had his anxieties, so had Titmouse his. He felt himself getting terribly out at elbows—so much so, that he could no longer give that undivided attention to his parliamentary duties, which his enlightened constituents had a right to expect at his hands: and, in short, the sole occasion of his calling on Gammon was to see if that gentleman could devise some mode of once more replenishing his empty coffers—a further mortgage on the Yatton property being the exact mode of doing so which he was about to propose to Gammon. It required some tact, however, as he felt, to broach that subject, in the present position of affairs; so he avowed that he had called to see if *Mr. Gammon's deeds were ready for signing*—as he, Titmouse, was anxious to get it off his mind. Time was very precious with Mr. Gammon: he therefore lost not a moment in plucking aside the thin disguise of Titmouse, and discovering the real object of his visit. Mr. Gammon looked very serious indeed, on hearing the account of Titmouse's prodigal expenditure, and remonstrated with him earnestly, and even authoritatively; but it instantly occurred to him—could there possibly be a better opportunity for broaching the subject of the two promissory notes?

"My dear Titmouse," said he, with great kindness of manner, "notwithstanding all I have felt it my duty to say, I do sincerely wish it were in my power to serve you in this emergency. But we really must spare old Yatton for a little—you've sadly burthened her already;—we shall be killing the goose to get at the golden egg, if we don't mind what we're about!"

"——! But what the devil's to be *done*, Mr. Gammon? For 'pon my soul, I'm most *particular* hard up, and something must be done."

"We must bethink ourselves of our other resources, my dear sir—let us see"—he paused, with his hand resting on his forehead for a few moments—"Oh! by the way—certainly," he added suddenly—"but no! it's a thousand pities; but my word is pledged." "Eh? what? does anything strike you, Gammon?—'Pon my life, what is it?" inquired Titmouse, pricking up his ears. "Why, yes, certainly," replied Gammon musingly—adding, as if he did not intend Titmouse to hear him, "to be sure it would put ten thousand—nay, with the interest, nearly eleven——" "The devil it would! *What* would? My stars, Mr. Gammon!" exclaimed Titmouse eagerly—"Do let us know what it is!"

"Why, I was certainly thinking, at the moment," replied Gammon with a sigh, "of that poor devil Aubrey's two notes for £5,000 a-piece and interest."

Titmouse's face suddenly fell. "Oh Lord! Is that all? Hang the fellow—he's a beggar—squeezed dry—nothing more to be got out of him!" he exclaimed, with mingled chagrin and contempt. "A'n't worth powder and shot! Blood from a stone—won't have anything worth taking this ten years to come!" "Poor fellow!" quoth Gammon. "Pon my soul, Gammon, it's *me* you may say that of, I rather think!" "Why," said Gammon, glancing rather keenly at Titmouse, "my first and greatest duty on earth, my dear Titmouse, is to *you*—to look after, to secure your interests; and candour compels me to say, that, whatever may be my feelings towards that unfortunate person, still I think, you've only to squeeze *him* pretty hard, and blood would come from *other* people. Eh! you understand?"

"By Jove!—Indeed!—No! But would it really? How!—Squeeze away, then, and be—! Please bring an action against the fellow, the first thing in the morning! Put him in jail, and he'll get the money, I'll warrant him! Dem the fellow! why don't he pay his debts? It's devilish hard on *me*, a'n't it? Didn't I forgive him forty thousand pounds? By the way, I'd forgot there's the other ten thousand that Lord De la Zouch is surety for—when do we touch that?" "Oh! we've taken a bond for *that*, which will not fall due before—let me see—the 24th of next January." "Pon my soul, what a cursed bore! But can't one do anything with it before then?" "What! Sue on it before it's due?" "No—egad! I mean, raise the wind on it. Surely Lord De la Zouch's name is—" "Whew!" thought Gammon, "that stroke certainly had never occurred to me!—Ay, he's right, the little fool! Old Fang will advance £8,000 or £9,000, or more even—I'll see to it, by Jove!" Then he said aloud—"It may be possible, certainly, my dear Titmouse; but I see very great obstacles in the way." "Some cussed law point—eh?" "Yes—but I assure you I will turn my best attention to it," he added; and proceeded to bring back Titmouse to the point at which he had started off. "And speaking of poor Aubrey—it's certainly true that you have been, I may say, extravagantly liberal to him—forebearing beyond example; and I can't think that any one can be expected, when he knows a wave of his hand will put some eleven thousand pounds into his pocket, to stand by idle for ever! It is not in human nature——"

"No; 'pon my life it isn't," quoth Titmouse with a puzzled air, quite unable to make out whether Gammon intended to favour or discourage the notion of immediately proceeding against Aubrey; which Gammon observing, he proceeded—"At all events I should say, that if you consider that your own necessities——" "Demme! I should think so!" interposed Titmouse. "Required it—and, as you very properly observed, *you* are the best judge; certainly"—he paused; surely Titmouse *now* saw his drift! "Yes—'pon my soul!" exclaimed Titmouse. "Why, in that case, it is only due to myself to say I can be no party to it: I have had to bear enough already that was due to others; and since I have solemnly pledged my word of honour to Mr.——" "What the devil *do* you mean, Gammon? Cuss me, if I can make you out a bit!" interrupted Titmouse, snappishly. "You misunderstand me, my dear Titmouse! Once for all, I say, if you want the money, you must at once sue on these notes; and my opinion is, you'll get the money—only, I *must not appear in it*, you know! But if you choose to employ some other solicitor—there's that Mr. Spitfire, for instance—to *compel* me to give up the notes——" "Oh Lord! Honour! No, no!—So bless me, Heaven! I didn't mean anything of the kind," cried Titmouse alarmedly, fearful of offending Gammon, who could scarcely conceal his impatience and disgust at the stupidity of Titmouse.

"I cannot make you understand me, Titmouse! What I mean is, it is my duty not to let my feelings interfere with your interest. I now, therefore, advise you immediately to put yourself into the hands—as far as this little business is concerned—of some other solicitor, say Mr. Spitfire, in Scorpion Court; and whatever he tells you to do—do without hesitation. You will probably tell him that, if he demands the two notes on your behalf, I may, for form's sake, resist; but I know I shall be ordered to give them up! Well—I can't help it!"

"Honour now, Gammon! May I do as I like?" inquired Titmouse. "Honour!" "And you won't be angry? Not a bit! eh?" "On my sacred word of honour!" replied Gammon solemnly placing his hand on his breast. "Then fire away, Flannagan!" cried Titmouse joyfully, snapping his fingers. "By Jove, here goes! Here's for a jolly squeeze! Ah, ha! Ten thousand drops of blood!—by Jove, he'll bleed to death! But, by the way, what will Mr. Quirk say?"

"Curse Mr. Quirk!" cried Gammon impatiently; "you know the course you are to pursue—you are your own master, surely? What has Mr. Quirk to do with you, when I allow you to act in this way?"

"To be sure! Well! here's a go! Wasn't it a lucky thought of mine to come here to-night? But don't you forget the other ten thousand—the two makes twenty thousand, by Jove! I'm set up again—ah, ha! And as soon as ever the House is up, if I don't cut away in my span-new yacht, with a lot of jolly chaps, to the East Indies, or some *other* place that'll take us a good six weeks, or so, to go and come back in. Hollo! Is that eleven o'clock striking?" he inquired with a start, taking out his watch; "It is, by Jove! and my pair's up; they'll be dividing—I'm off! Good-night."

"You remember where Mr. Spitfire lives?" said Gammon anxiously. "In Scorpion Court, Strand. I must say he's one of the most respectable men in the profession and so quick!"

"Ah—I remember! I'll be with him the moment after breakfast!" replied Titmouse: Gammon shook him by the hand—feeling, when he had shut both his doors, as if he had been playing with an ape. "Oh, thou undefinable and undiscoverable principle regulating human affairs!" thought he, falling into a reverie, a bitter scowl settling on his strongly-marked features; "of what nature soever thou art, and if any such there really be, what conceivable purpose can'st thou have had in view in placing this execrable idiot and *me*, in our relative positions?" He pursued this line of reflection for some time, till he had got into a far more melancholy and misanthropical humour than he had ever before fallen into—till, recollecting himself, and with a deep sigh, he rang for a fresh supply of coffee from his drowsy laundress; and then exerted himself vigorously till nearly five o'clock in the morning, at which hour he got, exhausted, into bed.

During the ensuing day, sure enough, he received a letter signed "*Simeon Spitfire*," and dated from "*Scorpion Court*," informing him that its respectable writer "was instructed to apply to him, on the part of Mr. Titmouse, for the immediate delivery up of two promissory notes for £5,000 each, given by one Charles Aubrey to the aforesaid Titmouse," and "begging Mr. Gammon's immediate attention thereto." Gammon immediately copied out and sent a letter which he had prepared beforehand—taking very high ground indeed, but slipping in, with a careful inadvertence, an encouraging admission of the strict legal right of Mr. Spitfire's client. 'Twas, in short, a charming letter—showing its writer to be one of the most fastidiously high-minded men living; but producing not the least favourable effect upon the mind of Mr. Spitfire, who instantly forwarded a formal demand for the two documents in question. Gammon wrote a second, letter alluding to an unguarded admission made in his

former letter, which he most devoutly hoped would not be used against him; and in terms of touching and energetic eloquence, re-asserted that, though the letter of the law might be against him, he conceived that, in point of honour, and indeed of justice, he was warranted in adhering to the solemn promise he had made to a gentleman for whom he entertained the most profound respect; and in short, he flatly refused to give up the instruments demanded. Irrepressible was the exultation of Mr. Spitfire, on finding himself getting so much the better of so astute a person as Mr. Gammon; and he took an opportunity of showing to every one who came to his little office, how Mr. Gammon had laid himself open to the superior tactics of the aforesaid Mr. Spitfire!—He then wrote a fine flourishing letter to wind up the correspondence, and stick into an affidavit, in the course of which he apprized Mr. Gammon that the Court of King's Bench would be immediately applied to for a rule calling upon him forthwith to deliver up the documents in question. On this, Mr. Gammon drew up an imposing and admirable affidavit, setting forth all the correspondence; and as soon as he had been served with the rule *nisi*, he instructed Sir Charles Wolstenholme (the late Attorney-General), Mr. Sterling, and Mr. Crystal, to “show cause” against it; knowing of course, as well as counsel, with whom he did not think it necessary to hold a consultation (for fear they should press him to give up the promissory notes without showing cause), that there was no earthly chance of successfully resisting the rule.—When he took his seat under Sir Charles, just before that learned person rose to show cause against the rule, he touched Mr. Gammon on the shoulder, and very warmly complimented him on the highly honourable and friendly feeling which he had manifested towards the unfortunate Mr. Aubrey; but he feared that the case, as far as the legal merits went, was too plain for legal argument;—but he had looked with unusual care over the affidavits on which the rule had been obtained, and at the form of the rule itself—and rejoiced to say he felt confident that he should be able to discharge the rule, with costs:—at which Mr. Gammon turned suddenly pale—with joyous surprise, as Sir Charles imagined—he not knowing Gammon so well as we do. The reader is now in a position to appreciate the following report of what took place—and (*inter nos*) which said report had been drawn up for the *Morning Grownl* by Mr. Gammon himself.

Court of King's Bench. Yesterday.
(*Sittings in Banco.*) *Ex parte* TITMOUSE.

“This was a rule, obtained by Mr. SUBTLE on a previous day of the term, calling upon Mr. Gammon, of the firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, of Saffron Hill, Hatton Garden, to show cause why he should not forthwith deliver up to Mr. Titmouse, M.P. for Yatton, two promissory notes, each for the payment, on demand to that gentleman, of £5,000, with interest, by Charles Aubrey. Sir CHARLES WOLSTENHOLME, Mr. STERLING, and Mr. CRYSTAL, now appeared to show cause—and took a preliminary objection to the form of the rule. After a very long discussion, the Court decided that the rule might be moulded so as to meet the facts of the case, and directed cause to be shown on the merits.

“From the affidavits filed in answer to the rule, it appeared that shortly after the termination of the late important case of *Doe dem. Titmouse v. Aubrey* (in which, it will be recollected, the lessor of the plaintiff succeeded in establishing his right to very large estates in Yorkshire), Mr. Gammon had been very active in endeavouring to effect an amicable arrangement concerning the mesne profits; and after great exertions, had persuaded his client Mr. Titmouse to enter into an arrangement, highly advantageous to Mr. Aubrey—who was to be released (as we understood), from no less a sum than Sixty Thousand Pounds, due in respect of the mesne profits, on giving the two promissory notes which were the subject of the present application. It further

appeared, that on obtaining Mr. Aubrey's signature to these promissory notes, Mr. Gammon had explicitly and repeatedly assured him that he need be under no apprehension of being called on for payment for several years; but that the notes should remain in the hands of Mr. Gammon, and should not be put in suit till after a twelvemonth's notice had been given to Mr. Aubrey. It did not distinctly appear whether Mr. Titmouse was ever made aware of this understanding between Mr. Gammon and Mr. Aubrey—at all events, nothing had ever passed in writing upon the subject. Mr. Gammon, on the contrary, frankly admitted it to be *possible* that Mr. Titmouse might have been under the impression, while surrendering so great a claim against Mr. Aubrey, that the sum secured by the two promissory notes was to have been before this time liquidated. There was no affidavit made on the subject by Mr. Aubrey. It also appeared that Mr. Titmouse had not hitherto received any portion of the large amount, £20,000, yet due in respect of the *mesne* profits. The affidavits read by the Attorney-General set forth a correspondence which had taken place between Mr. Titmouse's solicitor and Mr. Gammon, in which the latter insisted, in the most strenuous terms, upon the *honourable* engagement under which he conceived himself to be to Mr. Aubrey, and solemnly declared his belief that Mr. Aubrey was under a similar impression; at the same time, there were expressions in Mr. Gammon's letters, from which it was plain that he admitted the right, in point of strict law, of Mr. Titmouse to the documents in question. It also appeared from the affidavits of Mr. Titmouse, and was not denied by those of Mr. Gammon, that the former had repeatedly urged the latter to deliver up the notes, or commence proceedings against Mr. Aubrey—but that Mr. Gammon had, on all such occasions previous to the present one, succeeded in dissuading him from his purpose. It had, moreover, been alleged on behalf of Mr. Titmouse, that Mr. Gammon was acting in collusion with Mr. Aubrey, to defeat the just claim of Mr. Titmouse; but this Sir Charles Wolstenholme indignantly disclaimed on the part of Mr. Gammon, whose conduct throughout showed the nicest sense of honour, and the utmost possible anxiety to interfere between an unfortunate gentleman and utter ruin. But,

“The COURT, without calling on Mr. SUBTLE (with whom were Mr. GOOSE and Mr. MUD), said the rule must clearly be made absolute. The legal right of Mr. Titmouse to the notes was admitted by Mr. Gammon's own affidavit; and there was no pretence for holding that, as against Mr. Titmouse, Mr. Gammon, who was only *one* of that gentleman's attorneys, had any right to withhold the documents in question. No authority from Mr. Titmouse to Mr. Gammon to make the alleged representations to Mr. Aubrey had been shown, and consequently that gentleman could in no way be bound by them. He was not even shown to have been aware of them. It was not pretended that Mr. Gammon, or any of his partners, had any *lien* on the notes, which must be therefore given up to Mr. Titmouse. With respect to the imputation against Mr. Gammon of being in collusion with Mr. Aubrey, Lord Widdrington added, that from what his lordship himself knew of Mr. Aubrey, it was impossible for a moment to imagine him capable of anything inconsistent with the strictest honour; and that Mr. Gammon's conduct showed that, though mistaken as to the extent of his power over the notes entrusted to him, he had acted from the purest motives, and evinced an honourable anxiety to serve the interests of one whom he believed to be unfortunate.—The rule was then made absolute; but on Mr. Subtle applying for the costs, the remainder of the day was occupied in an elaborate discussion upon the question—which, however, was eventually referred to the Master.”

Nor was this all. The intelligent editor of the *Morning Grawl*, happening to cast his eye over the above, while lying in proofs, made it the subject of an eloquent leading article, in which were contained many just and striking

reflections on the continual inconsistency between law (as administered in England) and justice—of which the present—he said—was a glaring instance. It was truly lamentable—it seemed—to find truth and honour, generosity and justice, all sacrificed to the wretched technicalities, the petty quirks and quibbles of the law—which required a radical reform. Indeed, the whole system of our jurisprudence called for the most searching revision, which, he hoped, would ere long take place. Then followed some powerful animadversions upon the conduct of Lord Widdrington in giving effect to such pettifogging subterfuges as had that day served plainly to defeat the ends of justice; and the article concluded by calling upon his lordship to resign his seat on the bench! and make way for a more liberal and enlightened successor, who would decide every case that came before him, according to the dictates of natural equity and common sense, without being trammelled by such considerations as at present fettered and impeded the due administration of justice. It did so happen, *inter nos*, that this same incompetent Lord Widdrington had called down upon himself and his court the foregoing philippic, by having imposed a smart fine upon the publisher of the *Morning Grawl*, and superadded a twelvemonth's imprisonment, for an execrable libel upon an amiable and dignified ecclesiastic; and this, too, his lordship had done, after overruling an almost interminable series of frivolous and vexatious technical objections to the proceedings, urged by the defendant's counsel, in conformity with his urgent instruction to take every possible advantage.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT the earliest moment at which Mr. Aubrey could, without suspicion, extricate himself from the embraces of his overjoyed wife, sister, and children, on his return to Vivian Street, he withdrew to his study, in order to dispatch some letters, but principally, as the reader may easily imagine, to peruse the paper given him by Mr. Runnington with such ominous significance. His eye soon caught the words "*Ex parte Titmouse*"—and he read through the report of the proceedings with exceeding agitation. He read it over twice or thrice, and felt really sick at heart.

"Oh, unfathomable Gammon!" he exclaimed, at length, aloud, laying down the paper, and sinking into his chair. "Surely I am the weakest, or you the subtlest of mankind!" He turned over in his thoughts everything that he could recollect of Gammon's conduct from the first moment that they had met. He felt completely baffled and bewildered—and again perused the report of the proceedings in the King's Bench—and would have again relapsed into thought, but his eye happened to alight on two or three notes lying on his table, where they had been placed by Fanny, having come in his absence. He opened the first listlessly, not knowing the handwriting; but, on unfolding it, he started violently on recognising the handwriting of Gammon within; and with mingled wonder and fear, read as follows:—

"Thavies' Inn.

"DEAR SIR—God only knows when or where these hasty lines will find you. I am forced to address them to Vivian Street, being in total ignorance of your intended movements. If you have not taken my advice, and withdrawn from the kingdom I know not what grievous indignity may not have befallen you. You may have been torn from your family, and now incarcerated in prison, the victim of a most cruel and inveterate rapacity. My conscience bears me witness that I can say—I can do—no more on your behalf. I am grossly misrepresented

—I am insulted, by having base and sinister motives attributed to me, for my conduct towards you—for my anxious and repeated interference in your behalf. In the *Morning Groul* of to-day you will probably see—if you have not already seen—the report of some proceedings against me, yesterday, in the Court of King's Bench. It may apprise you of *the last* desperate stand I have made in your behalf. It is with bitter regret—it is with a feeling of deep indignation, that I tell you I am unable to fulfil my solemn, my deliberate, my repeated promise to you concerning the two promissory notes which you deposited with me, in implicit reliance on my honour. Alas! you must prepare for the worst! Mr. Titmouse and his new adviser can have, of course, but *one object* in requiring the surrender of the two promissory notes, which I have already been compelled to give up, under peril of an attachment for contempt of court. I have strained, God knows! every nerve on your behalf; have all but fatally quarrelled with Mr. Titmouse, and with my partners; and I stand in some measure compromised, by the recent proceedings, before the profession and the public—and *all in vain!* Yet, once more—if you are not blinded and infatuated beyond all example or belief—I implore you, in the name of Heaven—by every consideration that should influence a man of honour and of feeling—*fly!*—lose not a *second* after reading these lines (which I entreat you to destroy when read), or *that second* may involve your ruin—and the ruin of all connected with you! Believe me your distressed—your unalterable friend, O. G.”

Mr. Aubrey laid down this letter; and sinking back again into his chair, yielded for some moments to an impulse very nearly akin to despair.

“What am I to do?” he presently inquired, rising, and walking to and fro. “*Fly*—he says! Were I weak and unprincipled enough to do so, should I not, in all human probability, fall into the deepest pit he has dug for me?—but be that as it may—*fly* I will not! Never! Those dear—those precious beings in yonder room”—his heart thrilled within him—“may weep for me, but shall never *blush* for me!”

“Why—how horrid is my position!” he presently exclaimed to himself! “Ten thousand pounds and upwards, must either I pay, or Lord De la Zouch for me, within a few months;—here is a second ten thousand pounds, with nearly five hundred pounds of interest; I am to-day arrested for nearly fifteen hundred pounds; and this man Titmouse holds my bond for two thousands pounds more, and interest! Is it, then, Thy will, O God! that I am to sink beneath my troubles? Am I to perish from Thy sight? To be crushed beneath Thy displeasure?—Or, merciful Father—wilt *Thou* save me, *when there is none other to help.*”

Calmness seemed stealing insensibly over his troubled spirit; his agitated feelings sank gradually into an indescribable and wonderful repose; in that dismal moment of extreme suffering, his soul became blessedly sensible of its relationship to God;—that he was not the miserable victim of *chance*—as the busy spirit of darkness incessantly whispered in his ear—but in the hands of the *Father of the spirits of all flesh*, who listened, in his behalf, to the pleading of *One touched with the feeling of our infirmities—who was in all points tempted, even as we are.* His fainting soul felt sustained as by the grace for which it had sought; the oil and balm of a sound scriptural consolation were poured into his wounds. He sank silently upon his knees; and with clasped hands, and his face raised towards heaven, with profound contrition of spirit, yet with firm faith, besought the mercy which God has promised to those who thus will ask for it. Thus occupied, he did not perceive the door gently opened, and by Mrs. Aubrey—who, closing it hastily after her, flung her arm round his neck, sinking down beside him, and in a low, fond voice, exclaimed—“Oh, my own love! My own Charles! My poor, oppressed, persecuted, heart-broken

husband! Pray for me—me also!” He gently returned her embrace, looking at her unutterable things and after they had remained thus for a few moments, they arose. He gazed at her with unspeakable tenderness, and a countenance full of serenity and resignation. He gently soothed her agitated feelings, and succeeded in communicating to her a measure of the composure which he experienced himself. Before they had quitted that little room, he had even apprized her, faithfully, of the peril which momentarily menaced them—and again the cold waters gushed over her soul. At length, however, she had recovered her self-possession sufficiently to return to the room she had quitted, and instantly blanched Miss Aubrey’s cheek by communicating the new terrors which threatened them.

Just as they were finishing dinner—a mere mockery, however, of a meal—a double knock at the door occasioned them all not a little agitation; but, as the event proved, needlessly, since it announced the arrival of only their kind experienced friend, Mr. Runnington—who evidently felt infinitely relieved at finding that Mrs. Aubrey and Miss Aubrey had been made acquainted by Mr. Aubrey with the additional source of apprehension afforded by the report of the King’s Bench proceedings. Mr. Runnington felt assured that within twenty-four hours’ time proceedings would be taken against Mr. Aubrey; whom, however, he reminded, that as in the former, so, in the anticipated case, the extent of his immediate anxiety would be the finding bail for so very serious an amount: but that difficulty surmounted, he would be safe from personal annoyance and apprehension till the ensuing November. Mr. Aubrey then proceeded to apprise Mr. Runnington of the death of old Lady Stratton, and the grievous events connected with it, amidst the tears and sobs of Mrs. Aubrey and Kate. Though he said but little, his countenance showed how truly shocked he was at the intelligence. They then entered into a long conversation; in the course of which—“If our fears—our worst fears—be confirmed,” observed Runnington, “and they venture to put in suit these two notes—then they will have thrown down the gauntlet. I’ll take it up—and there’s no knowing what may turn up when we come to close quarters. First and foremost, I’ll tax away every farthing of the alleged ‘balance’ of their monstrous bill—ay, I’ll stake my reputation on it, that I leave them not a shilling; but, on the contrary, prove that you have already greatly overpaid them.” “Alas! have I not, however, pledged myself to Mr. Gammon *not* to do so?” interrupted Aubrey. “Pshaw!—Forgive me, but this is absurd. Indeed, Mr. Aubrey, it is really out-heroding Herod! All is fair against adversaries such as these! Besides, if you must be so scrupulous and fastidious—and I honour you for it—there’s another way of putting it, which I fancy settles the matter. By Mr. Titmouse putting these bills in suit, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap’s promise to you is not performed—it is broken; and so there is an end of yours, which is dependent upon the performance of theirs.”

“That is only on the supposition that they are playing me false—whereas the proceedings yesterday in court, especially when coupled with Mr. Gammon’s letters to me——” “All hollow! hollow!” replied Mr. Runnington, shaking his head.—“False and hypocritical! Who could trust to *Gammon*? This fellow Titmouse, whom they are doubtless fleecing daily, is in all probability desperately driven for ready-money; and they have allowed him to get hold of these two bills, after a sham resistance on the part of Gammon, in order to call forward your friends to the rescue—that’s their game, depend upon it!” Mr. Aubrey fired at the bare thought. “Yet I must own I am at a loss to discover what motive or object Mr. Gammon can have for going so far out of his way to secure your good opinion, or for wrapping himself up in so impenetrable a disguise. He is a very, very deep devil, that Gammon; and, depend upon it, has some sinister purpose to effect, which you will by and

by discover!" Mr. Aubrey then, for the first time, acquainted Mr. Runnington with Gammon's recent proposals to Miss Aubrey, at which Mr. Runnington seemed for some moments struck dumb with astonishment.

"I presume," at length said he, turning with a brief and sad smile towards Miss Aubrey, whose reddening cheek betokened the interest she felt in the conversation—"I presume, Miss Aubrey, there is no chance of seeing you pass into—Mrs. Gammon?"

"I should rather think not, Mr. Runnington," she replied with sufficient loftiness of manner; "and I am quite at a loss to conceive what could possibly have put such a thing into his head."

"Certainly, Mr. Runnington," said Aubrey, "I can undertake to say that my sister never gave him any encouragement."

"Encouragement?—Horrid man!" exclaimed Miss Aubrey with great vivacity. "I could never bear him—you know it, Charles—so do you, Agnes!" Mr. Runnington made no further observation on the subject, though his thoughts were very busy: he was satisfied that he was beginning to discover a clue to much of Gammon's conduct—for that that gentleman was acting with profound duplicity, Mr. Runnington entertained no doubt.

"What will be the earliest period," inquired Mr. Aubrey, "at which Mr. Titmouse, if so disposed, can put in suit my bond given to the late Lady Stratton?"

"As soon as he has obtained the grant of letters of administration, which cannot take place till the end of fourteen days from her ladyship's death—that being one difference, as you are aware, between the powers of an executor and an administrator." Mr. Aubrey sighed, and made no reply; while Mr. Runnington looked at him for some moments in silence, as if doubting whether to mention something which had occurred to him. At length—"Of course, Mr. Aubrey," he commenced, "one does not like to raise groundless hopes or fears; but, do you know, I am by no means free from doubts as to the reality of Lady Stratton's intestacy—whether the draft of her proposed will, brought over by Mr. Parkinson, could not be admitted to probate. Very—very nice questions, as you must be aware, often arise out of cases like these! Since seeing you this morning, I have written off to Mr. Parkinson for full and accurate information on the point; and if I get a satisfactory answer, with your consent, I will certainly lodge a *caveat* against the grant of titles of administration. That would indeed checkmate them! But I have very slight hopes indeed of receiving such an answer as one could wish," added Mr. Runnington fearful of exciting fruitless expectations.

Shortly afterwards, Miss Aubrey, who had appeared for some little time abounding under considerable excitement, addressing her brother said, with evident embarrassment—"Charles, I am very anxious to mention something that has occurred to me of a very singular nature—if you think I am at liberty to do so; and I shall first ask you and Mr. Runnington, whether, under the circumstances, you consider me entitled to disclose what I allude to." "Kate, Kate!—what is this?—What do you mean? You quite alarm me!" inquired her brother, with an amazed air. "Suppose Mr. Gammon, on the occasion of his calling upon me, which has been recently mentioned, volunteered a statement of a very, very extraordinary description—one that has ever since quite haunted me, day and night. Mind, Charles—I say that, in the first instance, he volunteered it, only expressing an earnest wish that I should mention it to no one; on which I said I should make no promise, but act as might think proper; and after my saying this, he made the communication allude to. Should I be at liberty," continued Miss Aubrey, eagerly and anxiously, "now to disclose what he told me? I am dying to do it, if I may, honourably."

"My dear Kate, I really fear you are wandering—that you are overcome with the sufferings you have gone through to-day," said her brother tenderly, and with infinite concern. "Indeed, Charles, I am not," she answered, with great earnestness. "Then I am of opinion that you may most certainly mention anything so communicated to you—I have no doubt, Kate." "Nor I, Miss Aubrey," added Mr. Runnington eagerly; "nay, I go further—with a man like him, I think it is your *duty* to disclose anything he may have said to you."

Miss Aubrey paused for a few moments, and then mentioned the singular circumstance with which the reader is already acquainted; namely, Mr. Gammon's distinct and solemn assurance to her, that he possessed the power of restoring her brother to the possession of Yatton; and that, too, by legal and honourable means; and that, if she would but promise to receive him as her suitor, he would pledge himself to replace them all at Yatton before claiming the performance of his promise.

Mr. Aubrey, Mrs. Aubrey, and Mr. Runnington, all listened to this strange story in silence, and gazed in astonishment at Miss Aubrey.

"Forgive me, dear madam," said Mr. Runnington at length, exchanging an incredulous glance with her brother, "if I—I—express a doubt whether you may not be labouring under a complete misconception——"

"'Tis impossible, Kate!" added her brother; but he knew, at the same time, his sister's strong sense; and all doubt vanished both from his mind and that of Mr. Runnington on her calmly and distinctly repeating what she had just said—giving even the very expressions made use of by Mr. Gammon, and which, she said, they might easily believe had made a very deep impression on her mind.

"It's inconceivable!" exclaimed her brother, after a long pause.

"It's an audacious and cruel falsehood, in my opinion," said Mr. Runnington: and all again were silent. Then he hastily ran his eye over the main points in the late proceedings by which Mr. Aubrey had been ejected from Yatton. "Either," he continued, after a pause, "he is a gross liar, or is labouring under insanity—or there has been shocking, atrocious villainy practised against you. If he be in his senses, and be speaking the truth—gracious Heaven! he must have brought forward a series of perjured witnesses at the trial."

"Did he drop any hint, Kate, as to the *means* by which he could bring about such a result?" inquired her brother after a long pause.

"No—not the remotest; of that I am certain. I observed that particularly; though shortly afterwards, I was so overcome by what he had said, and also by the manner in which he said it, that I fainted. Mr. Gammon must have carried me to the sofa; for when I came to myself I was lying there—though, when I felt myself losing my consciousness, I was standing near the window, which I had risen to open."

"It's the most amazing thing I ever heard in my life, I protest!" exclaimed Mr. Runnington thoughtfully: while Mr. Aubrey rose from his chair, and walked a few steps to and fro, obviously labouring under much excitement.

"Kate, Kate!" said he rather vehemently "you should have told me this the instant that you next saw me!"

"For Heaven's sake, be calm, dearest Charles!" cried Mrs. Aubrey, herself not a little agitated by the extraordinary intelligence just communicated by Kate, for the first time, even to *her*. Poor Miss Aubrey, on seeing the way in which her communication had been received, heartily regretted having mentioned the matter.

"This will require very great consideration, Mr. Aubrey, to know how to deal with it, and with Gammon," said Mr. Runnington. "I am inclined to think, at present, that he would hardly have ventured upon so outrageous a

piece of folly, as making such a representation as this, had there been no foundation for it in fact; and yet, I am quite astonished that a man so acute, so signally self-possessed, should have so committed himself—he must have been under some great excitement at the moment.”

“He certainly was, or at least seemed, a good deal agitated while he was with me,” quoth Kate, colouring a little.

“That is highly probable, Miss Aubrey,” replied Mr. Runnington with a faint smile. “It must have appeared to him, as one of the most likely occurrences, that Miss Aubrey should mention to you, Mr. Aubrey, so extraordinary a circumstance! It is very, very difficult to imagine Mr. Gammon thrown off his guard, on any occasion.”

Then ensued an anxious and prolonged conversation on the subject, in which many conjectures were made, but without leading to any satisfactory issue; quite a new light seemed now thrown upon all his past acts, and the whole tenor of his conduct. They read over his last two notes with new and deep interest, on the supposition that, while writing them, he was conscious of possessing the power which he had represented. All was mystery. Then was discussed the question, as to the propriety of either Mr. Runnington or Mr. Aubrey applying to Mr. Gammon upon the subject—a step which was, however, postponed for future and more mature consideration. Another thing suggested itself to Mr. Aubrey, but he kept it to himself:—should he at once apprize Mr. Gammon of the fact that Kate was in a manner unquestionably engaged to Mr. Delamere, and so at once and for ever extinguish all hope on the part of Mr. Gammon?

The evening, however, was now advancing, and Mr. Runnington pressed upon Mr. Aubrey the object he had chiefly had in view in calling. It was to prevail on Mrs. Aubrey and himself to accompany him that evening to his country house, which lay in the direction of Richmond, at about six miles distance from town, and where, for a brief interval, they might enjoy a respite from the frightful suspense and danger to which they were at present exposed in Vivian Street. Mr. Aubrey and Kate most earnestly seconded the kind importunities of Mr. Runnington; and after considerable hesitation Mr. Aubrey consented. It was accordingly arranged that, Mr. Runnington’s carriage not being in town, he should return within an hour with a glass-coach; and that, during the ensuing day, Mrs. Runnington should drive to town for the purpose of bringing back with her Miss Aubrey, and little Charles and Agnes. This having been determined upon, Mr. Runnington quitted them, promising to return within an hour, when he hoped to find them ready to start, and equipped for a several days’ sojourn.

As soon as he had left the house, Mr. Aubrey’s scruples began to revive: it appeared to him, that though it might be for a short time only, still it was, in effect, an absconding from his creditors: and there is no knowing but that his fastidious scruples, his delicate sense of rectitude, might have led him after all to send off Mrs. Aubrey alone, when, poor soul! he was spared the trial by an incident which occurred about half an hour after Mr. Runnington’s departure. Mrs. Aubrey was sitting in the parlour in travelling dress, fondling little Agnes, and talking earnestly to Kate about the management of the two children, and other matters; while Mr. Aubrey, also ready to start, was in the study selecting a book or two to take with him, when a heavy single knock at the door, unaccompanied by the sound of coach-wheels, nearly paralyzed all three of them. Suffice it to say, that within a few minutes’ time the wretched and almost heart-broken Aubrey was a second time in custody, and at the suit of Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq., M.P., for the principal sum of ten thousand pounds, and interest for twelve months, at the rate of five pounds *per centum per annum*. The agonizing scene which ensued I shall leave entirely to the reader’s imagination

—observing only, that the two minions of the law into whose hands Aubrey had now fallen, seemed totally indifferent to the anguish they witnessed. The chief was a well-known sheriff's officer—one Vice; short, fat, bloated; deeply pitted with the small-pox; close-cut black hair, almost as coarse as that of a hog; while the expression of his features was at once callous and insolent. Aubrey perceived at a glance that he had no consideration or mercy to expect at the hands of such a man as this; and the follower very much resembled his master.

"You're my prisoner, sir," said Vice, walking up to Aubrey, and with an air of matter-of-fact brutality taking hold of his collar with one hand while in the other he held his warrant. "If you like to clap a great-coat on, as it's getting late, you may; but the sooner you're off out of the way of all this here noise, the better—I should say." "For God's sake wait for a few minutes—I have a friend coming," said Aubrey, his wife clinging to his arm. "D—d if I wait a moment, that's flat!" quoth Vice, glancing at the two boxes in the passage, and guessing from them, and the travelling dress of Mrs. Aubrey, that he had arrived just at the very nick of time to prevent an escape.

"For the love of Heaven, stay only five minutes!" cried Kate, passionately wringing her hands—but she might as well have addressed a blacksmith's anvil as either of the men who were now masters of her doomed brother's person.

"'Tis useless, Kate—'tis in vain, my love!" said he with a melancholy air; and turning to Vice, who, with his companion, stood at only a few inches' distance from him—"Perhaps you will allow me to write down the address of the place you are taking me to?" he inquired, somewhat sternly.

"Write away then and make haste; for, write or no write, you're off!"

Mr. Aubrey hastily wrote down in pencil, for Mr. Runnington, "Vice—Squeezum Court, Carey Street, Lincoln's-Inn Fields;" and then having hastily drawn on his great-coat without taking with him even a change of linen—(for Vice would seem to have got the idea of a rescue into his head, and was, besides, anxious to run not the least risk with a *ten thousand pounds debtor*)—tore himself from the frenzied embrace of his wife and sister, and quitted the house. Vice had refused even to let his man go in quest of a hackney-coach, or to wait while Fanny ran for one; and the moment they had got into the street, the cries of Mrs. Aubrey and Kate yet ringing in Mr. Aubrey's ears, Vice put his arm with rough familiarity into that of Mr. Aubrey, directing his follower to do the same: and in this style they hurried Mr. Aubrey along the whole of the distance between Vivian Street and Squeezum Court; he uttering not one single word—but his heart almost bursting. Vice had received his instructions from Mr. Spitfire, who was a very dashing practitioner; and perfectly well knowing the value of every day towards the close of the term, had got his affidavit of debt prepared and ready sworn, and everything in readiness, even before the rule had been made absolute against Mr. Gammon. As the two captors and their prize—a gentleman between two ruffians—passed at a smart pace along the streets, they attracted considerable attention; now and then, even a little crowd would follow them for half the length of the street. Once Mr. Aubrey caught the words—"Poor fellow! Forgery, no doubt—he's a dead man in a month!"

Vice's lock-up was, though similar in its general appearance, yet of a much inferior description to that of Grab. It was smaller and meaner. They reached it a little after eight o'clock. "Are you for the parlour, or the common room?" inquired Vice, as soon as they had entered the house. "Which you please," replied Aubrey, quickly and gloomily. "P'raps you'd better show the gemman up-stairs," said the follower hesitatingly, to his master. "You pay extra up-stairs," quoth Vice; "which shall it be?" "I have no money, sir, to spare—I know the extortionating practices which—" "Oh, come along then!" replied Vice insolently; and in a minute or two Mr. Aubrey found

himself in a tolerably large, but low room, at the back of the house, lit by three or four candles. There were some ten or twelve persons in it, who were smoking, drinking, reading the newspapers, playing at cards, dice, pitch-farthing, and so forth. All seemed in good spirits, and suspended for a moment their various occupations to scrutinize the new-comer—on whom the door was in a twinkling closed and locked.

"Now, sir, just in time to cut in," said a thin pale man, stepping briskly up to him from a table at which he and two others had just begun to play a rubber. "Now, sir," he continued, in a confident tone, running the edges of the cards rapidly through his fingers with the air of an adept, and then proffering the pack to Mr. Aubrey.

"I do not play," replied Aubrey in a low tone.

"Better take a card—drive dull care away : you'll be devilish dull here without play of some sort." "I do not play, sir,—I certainly shall not," repeated Mr. Aubrey, somewhat peremptorily. "Only half-crown points—can't hurt you," he continued, with a flippant air ; till Mr. Aubrey walked from him with an air of disgust towards another part of the room.

"You're a liar !" said one of the two men playing at drafts, to the other, a dispute having arisen about the game as Mr. Aubrey passed them. "You're a cheat !" was the answer ; on which the man so addressed suddenly and violently flung a half-empty tumbler of brandy and water at the other ; it took effect on the forehead of his companion, who fell stunned from his chair, his forehead, which had been cut open, bleeding profusely. On this there was a general rush towards the spot. In the midst of this sickening scene the door was opened by Vice—

"Hollo—what's the matter ?" said he, locking the door after him, and coming up to the group round the fallen and miserable man who had been struck. "Who did it ?" cried he fiercely, on catching sight of the prostrate man. "I did," answered the perpetrator of the outrage ! "he called me a cheat." "*You did !*" quoth Vice, suddenly grasping him by the collar, as with the hand of a giant, and forcing him, despite his struggling, down to the floor, when he put one knee on his breast, and then shook him till he began to get black in the face. "D—n it, Vice, don't *murder* him !" cried one of the bystanders—all of whom seemed disposed to interfere ; but at this point, the man who had been struck, and had been lying for some minutes motionless, suddenly began to dash about his arms and legs convulsively—for he had fallen into a fit of epilepsy. The attention of all present was now absorbed by this one dreadful figure ; and the man whom Vice had quitted, rose flushed and breathless from the floor, and looked with a face of horror upon the victim of his ungovernable passions.

"I must get a doctor," quoth Vice, "presently," approaching the door ; and in passing Mr. Aubrey, who sat down looking exceedingly agitated—"Oh—here you are !" said he ; "come along with me."

"I hope this poor man will be properly attended to——" interposed Mr. Aubrey, very anxiously.

"That's *my* look-out, not yours," replied Vice rudely—"come you along with me !" and, unlocking the door, he motioned out Mr. Aubrey, and, after sending off a man for a surgeon, led Mr. Aubrey into a kind of office—where he was instantly clasped by the hands by Mr. Runnington, who had been there some five minutes. He looked like an angel in the eyes of Mr. Aubrey, who returned his cordial pressure with convulsive energy, but in silence, for his shocked and overcharged feelings forbade him utterance. Mr. Runnington looked both annoyed and distressed—for Vice had refused to discharge his prisoner on Mr. Runnington's undertaking, telling him the sum was a trifle too large for running any risk : and, in short, he peremptorily refused to do it without a written

authority from the under-sheriff; and added, he knew it was useless for Mr. Runnington to make the application—for they had only a few months before been “let in” for eight hundred pounds in that same way—so that Mr. Runnington had better, said Vice, be looking after a good bail-bond. In a word, Vice was inexorable; and a hint of the possibility of Mr. Aubrey’s flight to the continent, dropped by Mr. Spitfire to the under-sheriff, had caused that functionary to advise Vice “to look sharp after his bird.”

“At all events, let Mr. Aubrey be shown into your parlour, Vice,” said Mr. Runnington, “and I will settle with you when I return. I am just going to the office, to see what I can do with Mr. Ridley.”

“It’s no manner of use; and besides, it’s ten to one you don’t catch him—he’s gone to Clapham by this time,” said Vice, looking up at the dusky Dutch clock over the fire-place. But Mr. Runnington was not to be so easily discouraged, and started off on his friendly errand; on which Vice led Mr. Aubrey up-stairs into his “parlour,” telling him, as they went upstairs, that there were only two other “gentlemen,” there, and so “them three could make it comfortable to one another, if they liked.” Vice added, that as he had only one double-bedded room at liberty, they must agree among themselves which should sleep on the sofa—or perhaps take it by turns.

On entering the parlour two figures were visible; one that of a tall, pale, emaciated, gentlemanly person of about forty, who lay on the sofa, languidly smoking a cigar, more apparently to assuage pain than for the purpose of mere enjoyment. The other was a portly grey-headed man, apparently about fifty, and also of gentlemanly appearance. He was standing with his back to the fire-place—one hand thrust into his waistcoat, and the other holding a tumbler, which he raised to his lips as Vice entered, and having drained it, requested him to replenish it. ‘Twas the third tumbler of strong brandy and water that evening that he had dispatched; and his restless and excited eye and voluble utterance, testified to the influence of what he had been drinking. On Vice’s retiring, this gentleman began to address Mr. Aubrey in a somewhat incoherent strain—telling him of the accident which had that morning befallen him; for that Vice had laid his rough hand upon him just as he was embarking in an Indiaman, off Blackwall, to bid farewell to this “cursed country” for ever. This man had been a great merchant in the city, and for a series of years universally respected. He had a fashionable wife; and their ambition and extravagance, combined with losses unquestionably originating in a want of confidence on the part of his mercantile connections, occasioned solely by his ostentation, irregularities, and inattention to business, drove him to gambling speculations. Unfortunate there, he took to courses of downright dishonesty; availing himself of his character and power as trustee, executor, and otherwise, to draw out of the funds, from time to time, very large sums of money, to the utter ruin of some twenty or thirty unfortunate families, whose deceased relatives had quitted life with implicit confidence in his integrity. The guilty splendour thus secured him lasted for some few years, when an accident set him suddenly wrong:—a beautiful girl, for whom he was sole trustee, and every farthing of whose fortune he had appropriated to his own purposes, applied to him for the immediate settlement of her property. The next morning he had stopped payment; Mincing Lane was in a ferment—astonishment prevailed at the Exchange. Who could have thought it! said everybody. He was nowhere to be seen or heard of—but at length intelligence of his movements having been obtained by one of his numerous distracted victims, led to his apprehension in the way that has been already mentioned. Of all this, Mr. Aubrey, of course, could know nothing—but, nevertheless, he was somewhat struck with the man’s countenance and manner: but with what awful interest would Mr. Aubrey have regarded him, had he known that the miserable being

before him had determined upon self-destruction—and that within two days' time he would actually accomplish his frightful purpose!—For he was found in bed, a ghastly object, with his head almost severed from his body.

In the other—a ruined *roué*—Mr. Aubrey was infinitely shocked at presently recognizing the features of one whom he had slightly known at Oxford. This was a member of an ancient and honourable family, and born to a princely fortune, which he had totally dissipated in every conceivable mode of extravagance and profligacy both at home and abroad, and with it had also ruined his constitution. He had taken honours at Oxford, and was expected to have been very eminent in Parliament. But at college his tendency to profligacy rapidly developed itself. He became notorious for his debaucheries, and made ostentation of his infidelity. He had returned from France only a few days before in an advanced stage of consumption; and having been pounced upon by one of his numerous infuriate creditors, hither he had been brought the evening before—and would be the next morning lodged in the Fleet, as he could procure no bail; and there he might, possibly, live till he could apply to take the benefit of the insolvent act. If he should be successful in this last stroke, he could not possibly survive it beyond a few weeks! And he had nothing then to look forward to, but a pauper's burial.—He at length recognized Mr. Aubrey; and raising himself up on the sofa, extended his wasted hand to Mr. Aubrey, who shook it kindly—much shocked at his appearance.

After about half-an-hour's absence, Mr. Runnington returned, much dispirited. Mr. Ridley was not to be found; and, consequently, Mr. Aubrey must remain in his wretched quarters all night, and till probably an advanced period of the ensuing day—till, in short, Mr. Runnington should have obtained responsible sureties for his putting in bail to the action. Having whispered a few words to Mr. Aubrey in the adjoining room, and slipped a five-pound note into his hand, Mr. Runnington took his leave, pledging himself to lose not one moment in procuring his release; and charged with innumerable fond expressions to Mrs. Aubrey, to Kate and to his children—to whom Mr. Runnington promised to go that night.

Neither Mr. Aubrey nor Mr. Somerville—that was the name of his early acquaintance—quitted the sitting-room during the whole of the night; but as their companion retired early to the adjoining room, and immediately fell into heavy sleep, they at length entered into conversation together—conversation of a melancholy, but deeply interesting, and I may even add instructive character. When the chill grey morning broke, it found the two prisoners still in earnest conversation; but shortly afterwards nature yielded, and they both fell asleep—Mr. Aubrey, with a humble and fervent inward prayer, commending those dear beings who were absent to the protection of Heaven, and imploring it also for himself.

Immediately on quitting Mr. Aubrey, Mr. Runnington went direct to Vivian Street, and the scene which he had endeavoured to prepare for encountering, on their finding him return unaccompanied by Mr. Aubrey, was indeed most overpowering to his feelings, and heart-rending. Alas! how confidently had they reckoned upon an issue similar to that which had so happily occurred in the morning. 'Twas the first time—the very first time—since their troubles, that Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey had been separated for one single night. And he was now the inmate of a prison! Mrs. Aubrey and Kate sat up the livelong night—counting hour after hour, whose flight was announced by the neighbouring church clock. Their eyes were swollen with weeping, and their throbbing temples ached, as, at the first glimpse of dull daybreak, they drew aside the parlour curtain and threw open the window. They were, indeed, with some of old, *weary of watching*.

About mid-day thanks to the energetic friendship of Mr. Runnington, and

the promptitude of those whose names had been given to him by Mr. Aubrey, he made his appearance in Vivian Street. He saw Mrs. Aubrey and Kate as he passed, sitting at the window, anxiously on the look-out. They also saw him—sprang to the door—and opening it while he was in the act of knocking, they were instantly locked in each other's embrace. All their recent pangs were for a moment forgotten and drowned in the overflowing joy of such a reunion. He was already sufficiently subdued; but when he heard the footsteps of his children pattering rapidly down-stairs—and heard their little voices continually, and in eager accents, exclaiming, "Papa!—my papa!—where is papa?"—and when they ran up to him, and he felt their little arms round his neck—then he was overpowered—his lip quivered convulsively, and he could not refrain from bursting into tears. Towards the evening, they received a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Neville, who were infinitely shocked on hearing of the events of the last few days, and of which they had not the slightest intimation, living, as they did, at so great a distance, and not having seen their friends the Aubreys for several weeks. Poor souls! they also had their troubles—'twas wonderful how they contrived to exist upon the paltry pittance obtained by his ministerial duties; but they came ever with unaffected and refreshing cheerfulness; they never uttered a murmur at the thorny desert which life seemed destined to prove to them, but had always a comfortable word for their weary fellow-pilgrims. What a happy evening they passed together! Poor Neville was in high spirits; for an article of his, full of profound research and delicate criticism, which had cost him a great deal of labour to prepare, had at length been accepted by the editor of a classical and ecclesiastical review, who had forwarded to him a cheque for ten guineas. Mr. Aubrey could scarce refrain from tears, when the simple-minded and generous Neville pressed upon him the acceptance of, at least, the half of these, the unexpected proceeds of his severe toil. While they were thus sitting together, in eager and delightful conversation, there came a knock to the door, which, as may be easily believed, a little disturbed them all; but it proved to be a gentleman who asked for Miss Aubrey; and on her requesting him to come forward, who should it be, but the "gentleman" of my Lord De la Zouch; and while the colour mounted into her cheek, and her heart fluttered, he placed in her hands a packet, which had just arrived from the Continent.

They all insisted on having it opened then and there; and in a few minutes' time, behold their eager admiring eyes were feasted by the sight of a most superb diamond necklace—and at the bottom of the case was a small card—which Kate, blushing violently, thrust into her bosom in spite of all Mrs. Aubrey's efforts. There was a long letter addressed to Mr. Aubrey from Lord De la Zouch, who, with Lady De la Zouch, had been for some weeks at Paris—and one from her ladyship to Kate; and, from its bulky appearance, 'twas evident either that Lady De la Zouch must have written her a prodigious long letter, or enclosed one to her from *some one else*. They saw Kate's uneasiness about this letter, and considerably forebore to rally her upon it. Poor girl!—she burst into tears when she looked at the glittering trinket which had been presented to her—and reflected that its cost would probably be more than would suffice to support her brother and his family for a couple of years. Her heart yearned towards them, and she longed to convert her splendid present into a form that should minister to their necessities. While touching upon this part of my history—which I always approach with diffident reluctance, as matter too delicate to be handled before the public—I must nevertheless pause for a moment, and apprise the reader of one or two little circumstances, before returning to the main course of the narrative.

Mr. Delamere was at that moment at Rome, in the course of making the usual tour of Europe, and was not expected to return to England for some

months—perhaps for a year. But before quitting England he had laid close siege to Kate Aubrey; and had, indeed, obtained from her a promise, that if ever she became any one's wife, it should be his. That their engagement was sanctioned most cordially by Lord and Lady De la Zouch must have been long ago abundantly manifest to the reader; and they did not the less appreciate the value of the prize secured by their son, because of the proud and delicate sense Miss Aubrey manifested of the peculiarly trying position in which she stood with relation to them. Kate's own notion upon the subject was somewhat indefinite, she having resolved not to listen to any proposal for a union with Delamere, until her unfortunate brother's affairs had assumed a more cheering and satisfactory aspect; and that might not be for some years to come. If she replied to the letter from Delamere, enclosed by Lady De la Zouch—and reply she must, to acknowledge his brilliant present—it would be the first letter she had ever written to him, which will account, in a measure, for her embarrassment. And although all of them kept up a correspondence with Lord and Lady De la Zouch—from obvious considerations of delicacy and pride, they never gave the slightest intimation of the dreadful pressure they were beginning daily to experience. Lord De la Zouch remained under the impression that Mr. Aubrey was struggling, it might be slowly, but still successfully, with his difficulties; and had made up his mind, when called upon, to pay the amount of the bond into which he had entered in Aubrey's behalf, almost as a matter of course. As Aubrey desired evidently to maintain a reserve upon the subject of his private affairs, Lord De la Zouch, whatever might be his fears and suspicions, forebore to press his inquiries. How little, therefore, was either Lord and Lady De la Zouch, or their son, aware of the position in which their packet would find the Aubreys!

Within a few days, Mr. Runnington, by duly completing special bail in the two actions of *Quirk and Others v. Aubrey*, and *Titmouse v. Aubrey*, had relieved Mr. Aubrey from all grounds of immediate personal apprehension for several months to come—for at least half a-year; and on quitting Vivian Street, one evening, after announcing this satisfactory result of his labours, he slipped into Mr. Aubrey's hand, as he took leave of him at the door, a letter, which he desired Mr. Aubrey to read, and if he thought it worth while, to answer—at his leisure. Guess the emotions of lively gratitude, of deep respect, with which he perused the following:—

“*Lincoln's Inn.*”

“MY DEAR SIR,—You have once or twice, lately, been so kind as to express yourself obliged by the little professional services which I have recently rendered you in the ordinary course of practice. Permit me, in my turn, then, to ask a great favour of you; and, knowing your refined and exquisite sensibility, I make the request with some little apprehension, lest I should in any way wound it. I earnestly beg that you will accept a trifling loan of three hundred pounds, to be repaid as soon as you may be enabled to do so with perfect convenience to yourself. If, unhappily for *yourself*, that time should never arrive, believe me, you will not occasion me the slightest imaginable inconvenience; for a long and successful practice has made me long since independent of my profession, and of the world, as will, I am confident, be the case with you, should Providence spare your life. I happen to have been aware that, but for recent occurrences, it was your intention, about this time, to have commenced a second year's study, with either Mr. Crystal, or Mr. Mansfield the conveyancer. You will now, I trust, carry your intention into effect, without delay. I should venture to suggest, that at this period of the year, when the gentlemen of the common-law bar quit town for the circuit (as will be the case within a few weeks with Mr. Crystal), it would hardly answer your purpose to enter the

chambers of a gentleman in that department ; but that, as *conveyancers* remain very much longer in town, you will find it answer your purpose immediately to enter the chambers of Mr. Mansfield, and re-occupy your mind with those invigorating and invaluable studies in which you have already made, as I hear, so great a progress ; and which will serve to divert your thoughts from those wretched objects on which otherwise they will be too apt to dwell. You will find that I have this day paid in to your credit, at your bankers, the sum of £300. And believe me to remain, my dear sir—Ever your most sincere and faithful friend,

“ C. RUNNINGTON.

“ P.S.—Do not give yourself one moment’s concern about the expense of the recent proceedings, which is, I assure you, very trifling.”

I say that Mr. Aubrey read this letter with heartfelt gratitude, and permitted no morbid fastidiousness to interfere with his determination to avail himself of the generous and opportune assistance of Mr. Runnington ; and he resolved, moreover, to profit by his very judicious suggestions as to the course of his study, and to commence, as soon as possible, his attendance at the chambers of Mr. Mansfield. Thus, suddenly relieved, for a considerable and a definite interval, from the tremendous pressure to which he had been latterly subject, he, and indeed all of them, experienced great buoyancy and exhilaration of spirits. Could, however, their sense of tranquility and security be otherwise than short-lived ? What sort of a prospect was that before them ? Terrifying and hopeless indeed. As daily melted away the precious interval between the present time and the dreadful month of November—midst whose gloomy haze was visible to his shuddering eyes the dismal porch of a prison, where he must be either immured for his life, or its greater portion, or avail himself of the bitter ignominious immunity afforded by the insolvent laws—the hearts of all of them sunk to their former depth of oppression. Still, he resolved to work while it was day ; and he addressed himself to his studies with redoubled energy, and of course made proportionate advances.

Such being the footing upon which matters stood between Mr. Delamere and Kate Aubrey, what chance had Mr. Gammon of obtaining the bright object upon which he had set his dark and baleful eye, and to secure which he was racking his brain, and devising such intricate schemes of deliberate and cruel villainy ? As well might Gammon have sighed after the planet Venus—as sought to get Kate Aubrey into his arms. Yet full before his mind’s eye stood ever her image—though one would have thought that there was sufficient in his own circumstances to occupy every spare thought and feeling. Suppose the action of penalties went against him, and he should be at once fixed with a liability for some five thousand pounds, including debt and costs ? And more than that sum he had recently lost in a speculation in foreign stock, besides standing in a very precarious position with respect to certain of the many speculations in which he had launched both himself and others. Under these circumstances, it became hourly of greater importance to him to secure the annuity of £2,000 on the Yatton property, which he had with such difficulty extorted from Titmouse. He resolved, moreover, to try the experiment of raising money on the bond of Lord De la Zouch ; and it also occurred to him as possible, that even if he should fail in the main object which he had proposed to himself, in his artful proceedings against Aubrey, yet they might be the means of bringing forward friends to extricate him from his difficulties, by discharging the sums for which he was liable. It was, therefore, not till he had set into train the various matters which have been laid before the reader, that he set off on a hurried visit to Yorkshire, in order to ascertain the state of Lady Stratton’s affairs ; to make arrangements for collecting the evidence against the

impending trials for bribery ; and carry into effect some preliminary measure for augmenting the whole of the Yatton rent-roll, by nearly £2,000 a-year. His first interview with Mr. Parkinson apprized him distinctly of the exceedingly precarious nature of the alleged intestacy of Lady Stratton. Good Mr. Parkinson was no match for Mr. Gammon, but would have been much more nearly so if he could have done but one thing—*held his tongue* : but he was a good-natured, easy-tempered chatterer, and Gammon always extracted from him, in a few moments, whatever he knew upon any subject. 'Twas thus that he succeeded in obtaining conclusive evidence of the intestacy ; for Gammon discovered that the unexecuted draft of the intended will had never been seen by Lady Stratton, or read over to her ; but had been drawn up by Mr. Parkinson himself, a day or two after receiving her ladyship's instructions ;—that those instructions, moreover, had been merely oral.

"It is one of the most melancholy cases I ever met with !" exclaimed Gammon with a sigh. "I suppose the reverses of the Aubrey family frequently formed a subject of her ladyship's conversation ?" "Oh, she has talked with me for hours together—and even very shortly before her last illness !" "It is, methinks, enough to raise the poor old lady from her grave, to find her property diverted thus to one who does not want it, and who was a total stranger !" "Ay, it is indeed !" "I am a little surprised, to tell you the truth, that, under the circumstances, her ladyship should not have thought of at least *sharing* the policy between Miss Aubrey and Mr.——" "I do assure you that that is the very thing I have heard her several times talking about lately !"

"That will do," thought his wily companion ; "thank God she's clearly *intestate* then, for Parkinson's draft does not contain her *last* will and testament—that will do—thank you, my honest friend !" This was what was passing through Gammon's mind, while a sympathizing expression was upon his face, and he shook his head, and deplored the untoward event which had happened, in very pathetic terms indeed. On quitting Mr. Parkinson, Gammon thus pursued the train of his thoughts :—

"What if I should allow this paper to be admitted to probate ? Let me see—It will give Miss Aubrey some fifteen thousand pounds :—or one might take out administration in favour of Titmouse, and then suggest to her that I had the means of nullifying the proceedings, and carrying into effect Lady Stratton's intentions—for the letters may be *repealed* at any time.—Stay, however. It is by no means impossible, that when Parkinson comes to communicate with Aubrey, or that deep old fellow Runnington, they may think of lodging a *caveat* against our letters of administration : but they'll fail—for Parkinson must speak conclusively on *that* point. So, perhaps, the better way will be, to take out administration in the usual way, and see what *they* will do.—Then, there's Aubrey's bond—poor devil !—is it not unfortunate for him ?—But that shall be reserved ; let us see the effect of our other movements, first."

When Mr. Gammon returned to Yatton from the late Lady Stratton's residence, he found several letters awaiting his arrival. One was from Mr. Quirk—poor muddle-headed old soul !—all went wrong with him, the moment that he missed Gammon from beside him. He wrote letters every day, that were a faithful type of the confusion that always prevailed in his thoughts ; for though he was "up to" the ordinary criminal business of the office, in which he had had some forty years' experience, their general business had latterly become so extended, and, to Quirk, complicated, that his head, as it were, spun round from morning to night, and all he could do was to put himself, and everybody about him, into a bustle and fever. So he told Gammon, in this his last letter, that everything was going wrong, and would do so till "good friend Gammon returned ;" and, moreover, the old gentleman complained that Snap was getting very careless and irregular in his attendance—and, in fact, he—Quirk—had

something very particular to say to Gammon, when they met, about the aforesaid Snap. Then came a letter from the Earl of Dreddlington, marked "*Private and confidential*," containing a most important communication, to the effect that his lordship had that day granted an audience to a scientific gentleman of great eminence, and particularly well skilled in geology; and he had satisfied the Earl of a fact which the aforesaid scientific gentleman told his lordship he had discovered after a very close geological survey of the superficial strata of the Isle of Dogs—viz., that at a very little depth from the surface, there ran, in parallel strata, rich beds of copper, lead, and coal, alternately, such as could not possibly fail of making a quick and enormous return. His lordship, therefore, suggested the immediate formation of a company to purchase the Isle of Dogs, and work the mines!—and "begged to be favoured with" Mr. Gammon's views on this subject, by return of post. In a postscript, his lordship informed Gammon, that he had just parted with all his Golden Egg shares, at a considerable profit; and that the Gunpowder and Fresh Water Company's shares were rising daily, on account of the increasing probability of a universal war. Gammon did not think it worth while to send any answer to the letter of his senior partner, but wrote off a very polite and confidential letter to the Earl, begging his lordship would do him the honour of taking no steps in the matter till Mr. Gammon could have the honour of waiting upon his lordship in town. This letter over, Gammon wrote off another to the secretary of the Vulture Insurance Company, giving them notice of the death of Lady Stratton, who was insured in their office in a policy to the amount of £15,000, to which, her ladyship having died intestate, the writer's client, Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq., M.P. for Yatton, had become entitled as only next of kin: that Mr. Titmouse intended to administer forthwith, and formal evidence would be furnished to the Company, in due time, of the completion of Mr. Titmouse's legal title to the policy.

But here—I am concerned to say—the skittish, frolicsome, and malicious jade, Fortune, after petting and fondling Titmouse, and overwhelming him with her favours, suddenly turned round and hit him a severe slap in the face, without the least provocation on his part, or rhyme or reason on hers. And it happened in this wise. Dapper Smug, Esq., the secretary of the Vulture, wrote by return of post, saying that he had laid Mr. Gammon's letter before the directors; and that as soon as he should have learned their pleasure on the subject, he would write to Mr. Gammon again. And so he did—but only to request that gentleman to communicate with Messrs. Screw and Son, the Company's solicitors. This Mr. Gammon did, and in due time received a letter to the astounding purport and effect following—that is to say, that they had carefully considered the case, and regretted sincerely that they could not feel it their duty to recommend the directors to pay the policy!! The directors had a duty, sometimes—they would have it appear—a very painful one, to perform to the public; and, in short, it was plain that they intended to *resist the claim altogether!* Gammon wrote in astonishment to know the grounds of their refusal; and at length discovered that that truly respectable Company considered themselves in possession of decisive evidence to show that the policy was vitiated through the concealment, or rather the *non-communication* of a material fact on the part of the late Lady Stratton—possibly unintentionally—viz., that she was, at the time of executing the policy, *subject to the gout*. Gammon made anxious inquiries of the servants, of Dr. Goddart, Mr. Parkinson, and of others, who expressed infinite astonishment, declaring that she had never once exhibited the slightest symptoms of the complaint. Messrs. Screw, however, were politely inflexible—they declared that they had the positive testimony of several witnesses, one of them an eminent physician, to the fact that, during the very week in which the policy had been executed, she had experienced an attack of gout which had confined her to the sofa for

three days. [The simple fact was, that her ladyship had about that time certainly been confined to the sofa, but merely from her heel having been galled a little by a tight shoe.] They, moreover, sent to Mr. Gammon the full name of the officer in whose name the Company was to be sued—the aforesaid Dapper Smug; and requested Mr. Gammon to forward process to them in the usual way. Gammon, on inquiry, learned the character of the Company, and almost gnashed his teeth in rage and despair!—So at it they went—TITMOUSE (*Admr.*) v. SMUG. Then came a *Declaration* as long as my arm; *Pleas* to match it; then a *Commission* to examine witnesses abroad, principally a Dr. Podagra, who had settled in China; then a *Bill of Discovery* filed on behalf of the Company; a *Cross Bill* filed by Mr. Titmouse against the Company; a *Demurrer* to the one, *Exceptions* to the answer, to the other.—Here, in short, was in truth “a mighty pretty quarrel.” The stake was adequate; the Company rich; Mr. Titmouse eager; Gammon infuriate; and there was not the least chance of the thing being decided at all for three or four years to come and poor Titmouse was thus not only kept out of a comfortable round sum of money, but obliged to carry on all the while an expensive and harassing litigation. So much for insuring with a Company that looks so sharply after the interests of *its shareholders*, in preference to those of the survivors of the dead insurers!—But as far as Titmouse and Gammon were concerned, it seemed a *dead-lock*, and at a somewhat critical conjuncture too.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE sudden and unexpected rebuff encountered by Mr. Gammon, in the Vulture Insurance Company's refusal to pay the policy on the late Lady Stratton's life, was calculated seriously to embarrass his complicated movements. He foresaw the protracted and harassing course of litigation into which he should be driven, before he could compel them to liquidate so heavy a claim; but, with all his long-headedness—this refusal of the directors to pay the policy was attended with results which defied his calculations—results of such a description, and of such importance, as will perhaps surprise the reader, and serve to illustrate, in a striking manner, the controlling agency which is at work in the conduct of human affairs—an agency to which the principles of Mr. Gammon denied an existence. Nor was this the only trouble that about this period occurred to him; and not a little perplexed was he to account for such a sudden confluence of adverse circumstances as he by and by experienced.

On applying at Doctor's Commons, in the ordinary way, for a grant to Mr. Titmouse of letters of administration to Lady Stratton, Mr. Gammon discovered the existence of a little document, for which he certainly was not entirely unprepared, but which, nevertheless, somewhat disconcerted him; principally on account of the additional plea it would afford the Vulture Company for resisting payment of the policy. How, indeed, could they be expected to pay a sum of such magnitude, to a person whose title to receive it was disputed by another claimant? The document alluded to was a *caveat*, and ran thus:—

“Let nothing be done in the goods of Dame Mary Stratton, late of Warkleigh, in the parish of Warkleigh, in the county of York, deceased, unknown to Obadiah Pounce, proctor for *John Thomas*, having interest.”

Now, the reader will observe that this “*John Thomas*” is, like the “*John Doe*” of the common lawyers, a mere man of straw; so that this peremptory,

but mysterious mandate, would afford an inquirer no information as to either the name of the party intending to resist the grant of administration, or the grounds of such resistance. Mr. Gammon, however, very naturally concluded that the move was made on the behalf of Mr. Aubrey, and that the ground of his opposition was the alleged will of Lady Stratton. To be prepared for such an encounter, when the time arrived, he noted down very carefully the important admissions which had been made to him by Mr. Parkinson and having, for a while, disposed of this affair, he betook himself to the great conspiracy case, which I have already mentioned; and, in bringing which to a successful issue, he unquestionably exhibited great ability, and deserved the compliments paid him on the occasion by the counsel, whose labours, he had, by his lucid arrangement, materially abbreviated and lightened. This matter also over, and fairly off his mind, he addressed himself to an affair, then pending, of great importance to himself personally—viz., a certain cause of *Wigley v. Gammon*; which, together with the three other special jury causes in which the same person was plaintiff, was to come on for trial at York early in the second week of the assizes, which were to commence in a few days' time. As already intimated, Mr. Subtle had been retained for the plaintiff in all the actions, together with Mr. Sterling and Mr. Crystal; and, as Mr. Quicksilver had become Lord Blossom and Box, Mr. Gammon was sorely perplexed for a leader—his junior, of course, being Mr. Lynx. He had retained a Mr. Wilmington to lead for the other three defendants—a man of unquestionable ability, experienced, acute, dexterous, witty, and eloquent, and exceedingly well qualified to conduct such a case as Mr. Gammon's: but that gentleman got exceedingly nervous about the matter as the day of battle drew near—and, at length, resolved on taking down special Sir Charles Wolstenholme. Now, I do not see why he should have thought it necessary to go to so enormous an expense when such able assistance could be had upon the circuit—but, however, down went that eminent personage. Their consultation was gloomy; Sir Charles acknowledging that he felt great apprehension as to the result, from the witnesses that were likely to be produced on the other side.

"It's a pity that we haven't the Yatton election committee to deal with, Mr. Gammon!" said Sir Charles with a sly sarcastic smile. "We've rather a different tribunal to go before now—eh?" Mr. Gammon smiled—how miserably!—shook his head, and shrugged his shoulders. "We manage these matters rather differently in a court of law!" continued Sir Charles with a fearful significance!

When the important morning of the trial arrived, there was a special jury sworn. Mr. Subtle opened a very shockingly clear and strong case, to be sure; and what was worse, he *proved* it, and so as to carry conviction to the minds of all in court. Sir Charles felt his opponent's case to be impregnable; and, in spite of several acute and most severe cross-examinations, and a masterly speech, the stern and upright judge who tried the case, summed up dead against the defendant, with many grave remarks on the profligate and systematic manner in which it appeared the offences had been committed. After a brief consultation, the jury returned into court with a verdict for the plaintiff, in the sum of £2,500; that is, for five penalties of £500! A similar result ensued in the two following cases of *Wigley v. Mudflint*, and *Wigley v. Bloodsuck*; both of whom seemed completely stupefied at a result so totally different from that which they had been led to expect from the very different view of things which had been taken by the election committee. As for Mudflint, from what quarter under heaven he was to get the means of satisfying that truly diabolical verdict, he could not conjecture; and his face became several shades sallow as soon as he had heard his doom pronounced; but Bloodsuck, who had turned quite white, whispered in his ear, that *of course*

Mr. Titmouse would see them harmless—— “Oh Lord!” however, muttered Mudflint, in a cold perspiration—— “I should like to hear Mr. Gammon recommending him to do so, *under circumstances!*”

Poor Woodlouse was more fortunate—somehow or another he contrived to creep and wriggle out of the danger! Whether from his utter insignificance, or from the circumstance of the destructive verdicts against Gammon, Mudflint, and Bloodsuck having satiated the avenger, I know not; but the case was not pressed very strongly against him, and the jury took a most merciful view of the evidence. But, alas! what a shock this gave to the Liberal cause in Yatton! As soon after this melancholy result as Messrs. Mudflint and Bloodsuck had recovered their presence of mind sufficiently to discuss the matter together, they were clearly of opinion that Mr. Titmouse was bound, both in law and honour, to indemnify them against the consequence of acts done solely on his behalf, and at his implied request. They made the thing very clear, indeed, to Mr. Gammon, who listened to them with marked interest and attention, and undertook “to endeavour to satisfy” Mr. Titmouse of the justice of their claims; secretly resolving, also, not to lose sight of his own: nay in fact, he made sure of satisfying Mr. Titmouse on *that* score. But the personal liability which, in the first instance, he had thus incurred, to an extent of upwards of £3,000, supposing him, by any accident, to fail in *re-couping* himself out of the assets of Mr. Titmouse, was not the only unfortunate consequence of this serious miscarriage. Such a verdict as had passed against Mr. Gammon, places a man in a very awkward and *nasty* position before the public, and renders it rather difficult for him to set himself right again. ‘Tis really a serious thing to stand convicted of the offence of bribery; it makes a man look very sheepish, indeed, ever after, especially in political life. ‘Tis such a beam in a man’s own eye, to be pulled out before he can see the mote in his neighbour’s!—and Mr. Gammon felt this. Then, again, he had received a pledge from a very eminent member of the government, to be performed in the event of his being able to secure the seat for Yatton on a general election (which was considered not unlikely to happen within a few months); but this accursed verdict was likely to prove a most serious obstacle in the way of his advancement, and his chagrin and vexation may be easily imagined. He conceived a wonderful hatred of the supposed instigator of these unprincipled and vindictive proceedings, Lord De la Zouch—who seemed to have put them up like four birds to be shot at, and brought down, one by one, as his lordship chose! As soon as these four melancholy causes above mentioned were over—Gammon considering himself bound, on the score of bare decency, to remain till his fellow-sufferers had been disposed of—he went off to Yatton, to see how matters were going on there.

Alas! what a state of things existed there! Good old Yatton and all about it seemed woefully changed for the worse, since the departure of the excellent Aubreys and the accession of Mr. Titmouse. The local superintendence of his interests had been entrusted by Gammon to the Messrs. Bloodsuck, who had found their business, in consequence, so much increasing, as to require the establishment of Mr. Barnabas Bloodsuck at Yatton, while his father remained at Grilston; their partnership, however, continuing. He had, accordingly, run up a thin slip of a place at the end of the village furthest from the park gates, and within a few yards of the house in which old blind Bess had ended her days. He was the first attorney that had ever lived in Yatton. There was a particularly impudent and priggish air about his residence. The door was painted a staring mahogany colour, and bore a bright brass plate, with the words—“Messrs. Bloodsuck & Son, Attorneys and Solicitors”—words that shot terror into the heart of many a passer-by, especially the tenants of Mr. Titmouse. At the moment, for instance, of Mr. Gammon’s arrival at Yatton,

on the present occasion, actions for rent, and other matters, were actually pending against *fourteen* of the poorer tenants!! 'Twas all up with them as soon as the Messrs. Bloodsuck were fairly fastened upon them. Let them be a day or two in arrear with their rent, a *cognovit*, or *warrant of attorney*—for the sake of the costs it produced—was instantly proposed; and if the expensive security were demurred to by the poor souls, by that night's post went up instructions to town for writs to be sent down by return! If some of the more resolute questioned the propriety of a distress made upon them with cruel precipitancy, they found themselves immediately involved in a *replevin suit*, from whose expensive intricacies they were at length glad to escape, terrified, on any terms. Then action of trespass, and so forth, were commenced upon the most frivolous pretexts. Old and convenient rights of way were suddenly disputed, and made the subjects of expensive law-suits. Many of the former quiet inhabitants of the village had been forced out of it, their places being supplied by persons of a very different description; and a bad state of feeling, chiefly arising out of political rancour, had, for instance, just given rise to three actions—two of *assault*—and one of *slander*—from that once peaceful little village, and which had been tried at these very assizes! Poor Miss Aubrey's village school, alas! had been transmogrified into a chapel for Mr. Mudflint, where he rallied round him every Sunday an excited throng of ignorant and disaffected people, and regaled them with seditious and blasphemous harangues. 'Twould have made your hair stand on end to hear the language in which he spoke of the sacred mysteries of the Christian religion—it would have filled you with disgust and indignation to hear his attacks upon the Church of England and its ministers, and in particular upon dear little exemplary unoffending old Dr. Tatham, whom he described as "battening upon cant, hypocrisy, and extortion." Strange and melancholy to relate, this novel mode of procedure on the part of Mr. Mudflint for a while succeeded. In vain did the white-haired and learned vicar preach his very best sermons, and in his very best manner—he beheld his church thinning, while the chapel of Mr. Mudflint was filled. And, while he was about the village in the zealous, and vigilant, and affectionate discharge of his pastoral duties, he perceived symptoms, now and then, of a grievously altered manner towards him, on the part of those who had once hailed his approach and his ministrations with a kind of joyful reverence and cordiality. Mudflint had also, in furtherance of his purpose of bitter hostility, in concert with his worthy coadjutors the Bloodsucks, stirred up two or three persons in the parish to resist the Doctor's claim to tithe, and to offer harassing obstructions to the collecting of it. In justice to the Church, and to his successors, he could not permit his rights to be thus questioned and denied with impunity—and thus, to his sore grief, the worthy old vicar found himself, for the first time in his life, involved in a couple of lawsuits, which, he feared, even if he won them, would ruin him. It may be imagined that Mudflint's discomfiture at the assizes was calculated to send him, like a scotched snake, writhing, hissing, and snapping, through the village, at all that came in his way. It is possible that Mr. Gammon was not so fully apprized of all these doings, as is now the reader; yet he saw and heard enough to lead him to suspect that things were going a little too far. He took, however, no steps towards effecting an abatement or discontinuance of them. Just at present, moreover, he was peculiarly reluctant to interfere with any of the proceedings of the Messrs. Bloodsuck, and confined himself to receiving their report as to some arrangements which he had desired them to carry into effect. In the first place, he did not disclose the existence of his heavy and newly-created rent-charge, but gave them to understand that Mr. Titmouse's circumstances were such as to make it requisite to extract as much from the property as could possibly be obtained, by raising the rents—by effecting a

further mortgage upon the property, and by a sale of all the timber that was fit for felling. It was found necessary to look out for new tenants to one or two of the largest farms on the estate, as the old tenants declared themselves unable to sustain the exorbitant rents they were called upon to pay; so orders were given to advertise in the county and other newspapers. Then Mr. Gammon went all over the estate, to view the condition of the timber, attended by the sullen and reluctant wood-bailiff, who, though he retained his situation on the estate, mortally hated his new master, and all connected with him. Very little timber was, according to *his* account, fit for felling!

Having looked into these various matters, Mr. Gammon took his departure for town, glad to escape, though for never so brief an interval, the importunities of Messrs. Mudflint and Bloodsuck, on the subject of the late verdicts against them, and which he pledged himself to represent in a proper way to Mr. Titmouse. On arriving in town, he lost no time in waiting upon the great man to whom he looked for the political advancement after which his soul pined. He was received with manifest coolness, evidently occasioned by the position in which he had been placed by the verdict in the action for the bribery penalties. What the great man objected to was not Mr. Gammon's having bribed, but having done it in such a way as to admit of detection; but on solemnly assuring his patron that the verdict was entirely against evidence, and that Sir Charles Wolstenholme was, in the next term, going to move for a rule to set aside the verdict on that ground, and also on several other grounds, and that, by such means, the cause could be, at the very least, "hung up" for heaven only knew how long to come—till, in short, people had forgotten all about it—the clouds slowly disappeared from the great man's brow, especially on his being assured that Gammon's return for Yatton on the next vacancy was a matter of absolute certainty. Then he gave Mr. Gammon certain assurances which flushed his cheek with delight and triumph—delight and triumph inspired by a conviction that his deeply laid schemes, his comprehensive plans, were, despite a few minor and temporary checks and reverses, being crowned with success. It was true that his advances towards Miss Aubrey appeared to have been hopelessly repelled; but he resolved to wait till the time should have arrived for bringing other reserved forces into the field—by the aid of which, he yet hoped to make an equally unexpected and decisive demonstration.

The more immediate object of his anxieties, was to conceal as far as possible his connection with the various joint-stock speculations, into which he had entered with a wild and feverish anxiety to realize a rapid fortune. He had already withdrawn from one or two with which he had been only for a brief time, and secretly, connected—but not until he had realized no inconsiderable sum by his judicious but somewhat unscrupulous operations. He was also anxious, if practicable, to extricate Lord Dreddlington, at the proper conjuncture, with as little damage as possible to his lordship's fortune or character; for his lordship's countenance and good offices were becoming of greater consequence to Mr. Gammon than ever. It was true that he possessed information—I mean that concerning Titmouse's birth and true position—which he considered would, whenever he thought fit to avail himself of it, give him an absolute mastery over the unhappy peer; but he felt that it would be a critical and dreadful experiment, and not to be attempted but in the very last resort. He shuddered also to think that he was, moreover, in a measure, at the mercy of Titmouse himself—who, in some mad moment of drunkenness or desperation, or pique or revenge, might disclose the fatal secret, and precipitate upon him, when least prepared for them, all its long-dreaded consequences. The slender faculties of Lord Dreddlington had been for months in a state of novel and grateful excitement, through the occupation afforded them by his

connection with the joint stock companies, the fortunate members of which got rich they scarcely knew how. It seemed as though certain persons had but to acquire a nominal connection with some great enterprise of this description, to find it pouring wealth into their coffers as if by magic; and it was thus that Lord Dreddlington, amongst others, found himself quietly realizing very considerable sums of money, without apparent risk or exertion—his movements being skilfully guided by Gammon, and one or two others. 'Twas, indeed, ecstasy to poor old Lord Dreddlington to behold his name, from time to time, glittering in the van—himself figuring away as a chief patron—a prime mover—in some vast and lucrative undertaking, which almost, from the first moment of its projection, attracted the notice and confidence of the moneyed classes, and became productive to its originators! Many attempts were made by his brother peers, and those who once had considerable influence over him, to open his eyes to the very questionable nature of the concerns to which he was lending the sanction of his name and personal interference; but his pride and obstinacy caused him to turn a deaf ear to their suggestions; and the skilful and delicious flatteries of Mr. Gammon and others, seconded by the substantial fruits of his various speculations, urged him on from step to step, till he became one of the most active and constant in his interference with the concern of one or two great speculations, which he looked forward to realizing, at no very distant day, the most resplendent results. Never had one man obtained over another a more complete mastery, than had Mr. Gammon over the Earl of Dreddlington, at whose exclusive table he was a frequent guest, and thereby obtained opportunities of acquiring the good-will of one or two persons of the Earl's status and calibre.

His lordship was sitting in his library (his table covered with letters and papers) one morning, with a newspaper—the *Morning Groml*—lying in his lap, and a certain portion of the aforesaid newspaper he had read over several times with exquisite satisfaction. He had, late on the preceding evening, returned from his seat (Poppleton Hall) in Hertfordshire, whither he had been suddenly called on business early in the morning; so that it was not until the time at which he is now presented to the reader, that his lordship had had an opportunity of perusing what was now affording him such gratification; viz., a brief, but highly flattering report of a splendid whitebait dinner which had been given to him the day before at Blackwall, by a party of some thirty gentlemen, who were, *inter nos*, most adroit and successful traders upon that inexhaustible capital, *public credulity*—as founders, managers, and directors of various popular jointstock companies; and the progress of which, in public estimation, had been materially accelerated by the countenance of so distinguished a nobleman as the Right Hon. the Earl of Dreddlington, G.C.B., etc., etc., etc. When his lordship's carriage—containing himself, in evening dress, and wearing his red riband, and one or two foreign orders, and also his son-in-law, the member for Yatton, who was dressed in the highest style of fashionable elegance—drew up, opposite the door-way of the hotel, he was received, on alighting, by several of those who had assembled to do him honour, in the same sort of reverential manner which you may conceive would be exhibited by a party of East India directors, on the occasion of their giving a banquet to a newly-appointed governor-general of India! Covers had been laid for thirty-five; and the entertainment was in all respects of the most sumptuous description—every way worthy of the entertainers and their distinguished guest. Not far from the Earl sat Mr. Gammon—methinks I see now his gentlemanly figure—his calm smile, his keen watchful eye, his well-developed forehead, suggesting to you, a capability of the highest kind of intellectual action. There was a subdued cheerfulness in his manner which was bland and fascinating as ever; and towards the great man of the day, he exhibited a

marked air of deference that was indeed, to the object of it, most delicious and seductive. The Earl soon mounted into the seventh heaven of delight: he had never experienced anything of this sort before; he felt *glorified*—for such qualities were attributed to him in the after dinner speeches, as even he had not before imagined the existence of in himself. Mr. Titmouse, M.P., also came in for his share of laudation, and made—said the report in the *Morning Grownl*—a brief but very spirited speech, in return for his health being proposed. At length, it being time to think of returning to town, his lordship withdrew, Sir Sharper Bubble (the chairman), and others, attending him bare-headed to his carriage, which, his lordship and Titmouse having entered, drove off amidst the bows and courteous inclinations of the gentlemen standing on and around the steps. Titmouse almost immediately fell asleep, overpowered by the prodigious quantity of champagne and claret which he had taken, and thus left the Earl, who was himself in a much more buoyant humour than was usual with him, to revel in the recollection of the homage which he had been receiving. Now, this was the affair, of which a very flourishing though brief account (privately paid for by the gentleman who sent it) appeared in the *Morning Grownl*, with a most magnificent speech of his lordship's about free trade, and the expansive principles of commercial enterprise, and so forth: 'twas true, that the Earl had no recollection of having either meditated the delivery of any such speech, or actually delivered it—but he might have done so for all that, and possibly did. He read over the whole account half-a-dozen times at least, as I have already said; and at the moment of his being presented to the reader, sitting in his easy-chair, and with the newspaper on his lap, he was in a very delightful state of feeling. He secretly owned to himself that he was not entirely undeserving of the compliments which had been paid to him. Considerably advanced though he was in life, he was developing energies commensurate with the exigencies which called for their display—energies which had long lain dormant for want of such opportunities. In his place in the House of Lords, also, he displayed a wonderful energy, and manifested surprising interest in all mercantile questions started there. He was, consequently, nominated one of a Committee (into the appointment of which he and one or two others like him had teased and worried their Lordships), to inquire into the best mode of extending the operation of Joint-Stock Companies; and asked at least four times as many questions of the witnesses called before them, as any other member of the Committee. He also began to feel still loftier aspirations. His lordship was not without hopes that the declining health of Sir Miserable Muddle, the president of the Board of Trade, would soon open a prospect for his lordship's accession to office, as the successor of that enlightened statesman; feeling conscious that the mercantile part of the community would look with great approbation upon so satisfactory an appointment, and that thereby the King's government would be materially strengthened. As for matter of a more directly business character, I may mention that his lordship was taking active measures towards organizing a company for the purchase of the Isle of Dogs, and working the invaluable mines of copper, lead, and coal which lay underneath. These and other matters fully occupied his lordship's attention, and kept him from morning to night in a pleasurable state of excitement and activity. Still he had his drawbacks. The inexorable premier continued to turn a deaf ear to all his solicitations for a marquisate—till he began to entertain the notion of transferring his support to the opposition; and, in fact, he resolved upon doing so, if another session elapsed without his receiving the legitimate reward of his steadfast adherence to the Liberal cause. Then again he became more and more sensible that Lady Cecilia was not happy in her union with Mr. Titmouse, and that his conduct was not calculated to make her so; in fact, his lordship began to suspect that there was

a total incompatibility of tempers and dispositions, which would inevitably force on a separation—under existing circumstances a painful step, and eminently unadvisable. His lordship's numerous inquiries of Mr. Gammon as to the state of Mr. Titmouse's property, met occasionally with unsatisfactory and (as any one of clearer head than his lordship would have seen) most inconsistent answers. Mr. Titmouse's extravagant expenditure was a matter of notoriety; the Earl himself had been once or twice compelled to come forward, in order to assist in relieving his son-in-law's house from executions; and he repeatedly reasoned and remonstrated with Mr. Titmouse on the impropriety of many parts of his conduct—Titmouse generally acknowledging, with much appearance of compunction and sincerity, that the Earl had too much ground for complaint, and protesting that he meant to change altogether one of these days. Indeed, matters would soon have been brought to a crisis between the Earl and Titmouse, had the Earl not been so constantly immersed in business, as to prevent his mind from dwelling upon the various instances of Titmouse's misconduct which from time to time came under his notice. The condition of Lady Cecilia was one which gave the Earl anxiety and interest. She was *enciente*; and the prospect which this afforded the Earl of the family honours continuing in a course of direct descent, gave him unspeakable satisfaction. The above will suffice to indicate the course taken by his lordship's thoughts on the present occasion. He sat back in his chair in a sort of reverie; having laid down his paper, and placed his gold spectacles on the little stand beside him, where lay also his massive old gold repeater. The *Morning Groul* of that morning was very late, owing to the arrival of foreign news; but it was brought in to his lordship just as he was beginning to open his letters. These his lordship laid aside for a moment, in order to skim over the contents of his paper; on which he had not been long engaged, before his eye lit upon a paragraph that gave him a dreadful shock, throwing him into an universal tremor. He read it over several times, almost doubting whether he could be reading correctly. It is possible that the experienced reader may not be taken as much by surprise as was the Earl of Dreddlington; but the intelligence conveyed by the paragraph in question was simply this—that the Artificial Rain Company had, so to speak, suddenly evaporated!—and that this result had been precipitated by the astounding discovery in the City, in the preceding afternoon, that the managing director of the Company had *bolted* with all the available funds of the society—and who should this be, but the gentleman who had presided so ably the evening before over the Blackwall dinner to his lordship, viz., Sir Sharper Bubble!!! The plain fact was, that that worthy had, at that very time, completed all arrangements necessary for taking the very decisive step on which he had determined; and, within an hour's time of handing the Earl of Dreddlington to his carriage, in the way that has been described, had slipped into a boat moored by the water side, and got safely on board a fine brig bound for America, just as she was hauling up anchor, and spreading forth her canvas before a strong steady east wind, which was at that moment bearing him, under the name of Mr. Snooks, rapidly away from the artificial and unsatisfactory state of things which prevailed in the Old World, to a new one, where he hoped there would not exist such impediments in the way of extended commercial enterprise. As soon as the Earl had a little recovered from the agitation into which this announcement had thrown him, he hastily rang his bell, and ordered his carriage to be got instantly in readiness. Having put the newspaper into his pocket, he was soon on his way, at a great speed, towards the Poultry, in the City, where was the office of the Company, with the faintest glimmer of a hope that there might be some mistake about the matter. Ordering his servant to let him out the instant that the carriage drew up, the Earl, not allowing his servant to anticipate him, got down and rang the bell, the outer door being closed, although

it was now twelve o'clock. The words "*Artificial Rain Company*" still shone, in gilt letters half a foot long, on the green blind of the window on the ground floor! All still—deserted—dry as Gideon's fleece! An old woman presently answered his summons. She said she believed the business was given up; and there had been a good many gentlemen inquiring about it—that he was welcome to go in—but there was nobody in except her and a little child. With an air of inconceivable agitation, his lordship went into the offices on the ground floor. All was silent: no clerks; no servants, no porters, or messengers; no books, or prospectuses, or writing materials. "I've just given everything a good dusting, sir," said she to the Earl, at the same time wiping off a little dust with the corner of her apron, and which had escaped her. Then the Earl went up-stairs into the "Board Room." There, also, all was silent and deserted, and very clean and in good order. There was the green baize-covered table, at which he had often sat, presiding over the enlightened deliberations of the directors. The Earl gazed in silent stupor about him.

"They say it's a blow-up, sir," quoth the old woman. "But I should think it rather sudden! There's been several here has looked as much struck as you, sir!" This recalled the Earl to his senses, and, without uttering a word, he descended the stairs. "Beg pardon, sir—but could you tell me who I'm to look to for taking care of the place? I can't find out the gentleman as sent for me——" "My good woman," replied the Earl faintly, hastening from the horrid scene, "I know nothing about it," and stepping into his carriage, he ordered it to drive on to Lombard Street, to the *late* Company's bankers. As soon as he had, with a little indistinctness arising from his agitation, mentioned the words "*Artificial Rain*——"

"Account closed!" was the brief matter-of-fact answer, given in a business-like and peremptory tone, the speaker immediately attending to some one else. The Earl was too much agitated to observe a knowing wink interchanged among the clerks behind, as soon as they had caught the words "*Artificial Rain Company*!"—The Earl, with increasing agitation, re-entered his carriage, and ordered it to be driven to the office of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. There he arrived in a trice; but, being informed that Mr. Gammon had not yet come, and would probably be found at his chambers in Thavies' Inn, the horses' heads were forthwith turned, and within a few minutes' time the carriage had drawn up opposite to the entrance to Thavies' Inn—where the Earl had never been before. Without sending his servant on beforehand to inquire, his lordship immediately alighted, and soon found out the staircase where were Mr. Gammon's chambers, on the first floor. The words "Mr. Gammon" were painted in white letters over the door, the outer one being open. His lordship's rather hasty summons was answered by Mr. Gammon's laundress, a tidy middle-aged woman, who lived in the chambers, and informed the Earl, that if he wished to see Mr. Gammon, he had better step in and wait for a minute or two—as Mr. Gammon had only just gone to the stationer's a little way off, and said he should be back in a minute or two. In went the Earl, and sat down in Mr. Gammon's sitting-room. It was a fair-sized room, neatly furnished, more for use than show. A plain deal book case, stretching over the whole of one side of the room, was filled with books, and beside it, and opposite to the fireplace, was the door of Mr. Gammon's bedroom—which, being open, appeared as if not having been yet set to rights. Mr. Gammon had not risen very early that morning. The Earl sat down, having removed his hat; and in placing it upon the table, his eyes lit upon an object that suggested to him a new source of amazement and alarm. It was a newly-executed parchment conveyance, folded up in the usual way, about a foot square in size; and as the Earl sat down, his eye could scarcely fail to read the super-

scription, in large round hand, which was turned full towards him, and, in short, ran thus:—

TITTLBAT TITMOUSE, Esq.,
to
Oily Gammon, *Gent.*

} Grant of RENT-CHARGE on
Estates at Yatton, of £2,000
per annum.

This almost stopped the Earl's breath. With trembling hands he put on his spectacles, to assure himself that he read correctly; and with a face overspread with dismay, was gazing intently at the writing, holding the parchment in his hands; and while thus absorbed, Mr. Gammon entered, having shot across the inn, and sprung upstairs with lightning speed, the instant that his eye had caught Lord Dreddlington's equipage standing opposite to the inn. He had instantly recollected having left on the table the deed in question, which had been executed by Titmouse only the evening before; and little anticipated that, of all persons upon earth, Lord Dreddlington would be the first whose eyes would light upon it. 'Twas, perhaps, somewhat indiscreet to leave it there; but it was in Gammon's own private residence—where he had very few visitors, especially at that time of the day—and he had intended only a momentary absence, having gone out on the impulse of a sudden suggestion. See the result!

"My Lord Dreddlington!" exclaimed Gammon, breathless with haste and agitation, the instant he saw his worst apprehensions fulfilled. The Earl looked up at him, as it were mechanically, over his glasses, without moving, or attempting to speak.

"I—I—beg your lordship's pardon!" he added quickly and sternly, advancing towards Lord Dreddlington. "Pardon me, but surely your lordship cannot be aware of the liberty you are taking—my private papers!"—and with an eager and not over-ceremonious hand, he took the conveyance out of the unresisting grasp of his noble visitor.

"Sir—Mr. Gammon!"—at length exclaimed the Earl in a faltering voice—"what is the meaning of that?" pointing with a tremulous finger to the conveyance which Mr. Gammon held in his hand.

"*What is it?* A private—a strictly private document of mine, my lord"—replied Gammon with breathless impetuosity, his eye flashing fury, and his face having become deadly pale—"one with which your lordship has no more concern than your footman—one which I surely might have fancied safe from intrusive eyes in *my own private residence*—one which I am confounded—yes, confounded! my Lord, at finding that you could for an instant allow yourself—consider yourself warranted in even looking at—prying into—and much less presuming to ask questions concerning it." He held the parchment all this while tightly grasped in his hands; his appearance and manner might have overpowered a man of stronger nerves than the Earl of Dreddlington. On him, however, it appeared to produce no impression—his faculties seeming quite absorbed with the discovery he had just made, and he simply inquired, without moving from his chair—"Is it a fact, sir, that you have obtained a rent-charge of two thousand a-year upon my son-in-law's property at Yatton?"

"I deny peremptorily your lordship's right to ask me a single question arising out of information in such a dis—I mean such an unprecedented manner!" answered Gammon, vehemently.

"Two thousand a-year, sir!—out of my son-in-law's property?" repeated the Earl, with a kind of bewildered incredulity.

"I cannot comprehend your lordship's conduct in attempting neither to justify what you have done, nor apologize for it," said Gammon, endeavouring to speak calmly; and at the same time depositing the conveyance in a large iron safe, and then locking the door of it, Lord Dreddlington, the while, eyeing his movements in silence.

"Mr. Gammon, I must and will have this matter explained; depend upon it, I will have it looked into and thoroughly sifted," at length said Lord Dreddlington, with returning self-possession, as Gammon observed.

"Can your lordship derive any right to information from me, out of an act of your lordship's which no honourable mind—nay, if your lordship insists on my making myself understood—I will say, an act which no gentleman would resort to, unless——" The Earl rose from his chair with calmness and dignity.

"What *your* notions of honourable or gentlemanly conduct may happen to be, sir," said the old peer, drawing himself up to his full height, and speaking with his usual deliberation, "it may not be worth my while to inquire; but let me tell you, sir——" "My lord, I beg your forgiveness—I have certainly been hurried by my excitement into expressions which I would gladly withdraw." "Hear me, sir," replied the Earl, with a composure which, under the circumstances, was wonderful; "it is the first time in my life that anyone has presumed to speak to me in such a manner, and to use such language; and I will neither forget it, sir, nor forgive it."

"Then, my lord, I take the liberty of re-asserting what I had withdrawn," said Gammon, his blood tingling in all his veins. He had never given Lord Dreddlington credit for being able to exhibit the spirit and self-command he was then displaying. The Earl bowed loftily as Gammon spoke; and on his concluding, said with haughty composure—

"When I entered your room, sir, that document caught my eye accidentally; and on seeing upon the outside of it—for no further have I looked—the name of my own son-in-law, it was but natural that I should suppose there could be no objection to my looking further, at the outside. That was my opinion, sir—that *is* my opinion; your presumptuous expressions, sir, cannot change my opinion, nor make me forget our relative positions," he added loftily; "and I once more demand, sir, what is the meaning of that extraordinary document!"

Mr. Gammon was taken quite by surprise by this calmness and resolution on the part of the Earl; and while his lordship spoke, and for some moments after gazed at him sternly, yet irresolutely, his faculties strained to their utmost to determine upon the course he should take in so totally unexpected an emergency. He was not long, however, in deciding.

"Since your lordship desires information from me, let me request you to be seated," said he, in a tone and with an air of profound courtesy, such as, in its turn, took his noble companion by surprise; and he slowly resumed his seat, Gammon also sitting down nearly opposite to him. "May I, in the first place, ask to what circumstance I am indebted, my lord, for the honour of this visit?" he inquired.

"Oh, sir—sir—by the way—indeed you may well ask—you must have heard"—suddenly and vehemently interrupted the Earl, whose mind could hold but one important matter at a time.

"To what does your lordship allude?" inquired Gammon, who knew perfectly well all the while. Having had a hint that matters were going wrong with the Artificial Rain Company, he had contrived to creep out of it, by selling such shares as he held, at a little loss certainly—and he would have done the same for the Earl had it been practicable; but his lordship's sudden journey into Hertfordshire had prevented his communicating with his lordship, till the time for acting had passed. Now, therefore, he resolved to be taken by surprise.

"To what do I allude, sir!" echoed the Earl with much agitation, taking the newspaper from his pocket—"The Artificial Rain Company, sir——" "Well, my lord!"—exclaimed Gammon impatiently. "Sir, it is gone! Blown up! Entirely disappeared, sir!" "Gone! Blown up! The Artificial Rain Company? Oh, my lord, it's impossible!" cried Gammon with well-feigned amazement. "Sir—it is clean gone. Sir Sharper Bubble has absconded!"

His lordship handed the paper to Mr. Gammon, who read the paragraph (which he had read some hour or two before in bed, where his own copy of the *Morning Grawl* was at that moment lying) with every appearance of horror, and the paper quite shook in his trembling hands.

"It cannot—it *cannot* be true, my lord!" said he. "Sir, it *is*. I have been myself to the Company's office—it is quite closed—shut up; there is only an old woman there, sir! And at the banker's, the only answer is—'Account closed!'"

"Then I am nearly a couple of thousand pounds poorer—my God! what shall I do? Do, my lord, let us drive off instantly to Sir Sharper Bubble's house, and see if he be really gone. It may be a villainous fabrication altogether—I never will believe that such a man—How miserable, that both your lordship and I should have been out of town yesterday!"

Thus Gammon went on, with great eagerness, hoping to occupy Lord Dredlington's thoughts exclusively in the matter; but he was mistaken. The Earl, after a little pause, reverted to the previous topic, and repeated his inquiry as to the rent-charge, with an air of such serious determination as soon satisfied Gammon that there was no evading the crisis which had so suddenly arisen. With the topic, his lordship also unconsciously changed his manner, which was now one of offended majesty.

"Sir," said he, with stately deliberation, "what you have said to myself personally, cannot be unsaid; but I desire a plain answer, Mr. Gammon, to a plain question. Is the document which I had in my hand, an instrument giving you a charge of two thousand pounds a-year upon my son-in-law's estate? Sir, once for all, I peremptorily insist on an answer before I leave your chambers; and, if I do not obtain it, I shall instantly cause a rigorous inquiry to be set on foot."

"[*You drivelling obstinate old fool!*]" thought Gammon, looking the while with mild anxiety at the Earl, "*if you were to drop down dead at my feet, now, at this moment, what vexation you would save me!* Did it ever before fall to the lot of mortal man to have to deal with two such idiots as you and Titmouse?"

"Well, then, my lord, since you are so pertinacious on the point—retaining my strong opinion concerning the very unwarrantable means which enable you to put the question to me—I disdain equivocation or further concealment," he continued with forced composure, "and distinctly admit that the document which was lately in your lordship's hands, *is* an instrument having the effect which it professes to have. It gives me, my lord, a rent-charge for the term of my life, of two thousand pounds a-year upon Mr. Titmouse's estate at Yatton."

"Good God, sir!" exclaimed the Earl, gazing at Gammon, as if thunder-struck with an answer which, nevertheless, he could not but have calculated upon—and which was indeed inevitable. "That is the fact, my lord, undoubtedly," said Gammon, with the air of a man who has made up his mind to encounter something very serious and unpleasant. "There never was such a thing heard of, sir! Two thousand pounds a-year given to his solicitor by my son-in-law! Why, he is a mere boy——" "He was old enough to marry the Lady Cecilia, my lord," interrupted Gammon calmly, but very bitterly.

"That may be sir," replied the Earl, his face faintly flushing—"but he is ignorant of business, sir—of the world—or you must have taken advantage of him when he was intoxicated." "Nothing—nothing of the kind, my lord. Never was Mr. Titmouse more sober—never in fuller possession of his faculties—never did he do anything more deliberately, than when he signed that conveyance." "Why, have you purchased it, sir? Given consideration for it?" inquired the Earl, with a perplexed air. "Why did not your lordship ask that question before you felt yourself at liberty to make the harsh and injurious

comments you have——” “Sir, you evade my question.” “No, my lord—I do not wish to do so. I *have* given value for it—full value; and Mr. Titmouse, if you ask him, will tell you so.”

The Earl paused. “And is the consideration recorded in the deed, sir?” “It is, my lord—and truly.” “I must again ask you, sir—do you mean to tell me that you have given full value for this rent-charge?” “Full value, my lord.” “Then why all this mystery, Mr. Gammon?”

“Let me ask, in my turn, my lord, why all these questions about a matter with which you have nothing to do? Would it not be much better for your lordship to attend to *your own* affairs, just now, after the very alarming——”

“Sir—sir—I—I—that is—*my* concern,” stammered the Earl, very nearly thrust out of his course by this stroke of Gammon’s; but he soon recovered himself—for the topic they were discussing had taken a thorough hold of his mind. “Did you give a pecuniary consideration, Mr. Gammon?” “I gave a large sum in ready money; and the remainder of the consideration is expressed to be, my long and arduous services to Mr. Titmouse, in putting him into possession of his property.” “Will you, then, favour me with a copy of this deed, that I may examine it, and submit it to competent——” “No, my lord, I will do no such thing,” replied Gammon peremptorily. “You will not, sir?” repeated the Earl after a pause, his cold blue eye fixed steadfastly upon that of Gammon, and his face full of stern and haughty defiance. “No, my lord, I will not. Probably *that* answer is explicit enough!” replied Gammon, returning Lord Dreddlington’s look with unwavering steadfastness.

There was a pause. “But one conclusion can be drawn, then, from your refusal, sir—one highly disadvantageous to you, sir. No one can avoid the conclusion that there has been foul play, and fraud——”

“You are a peer of the realm, Lord Dreddlington; try to be a *gentleman*,” said Gammon, who had turned deadly pale. The Earl’s eye continued fixed on Gammon, and his lip slightly quivered. He seemed amazed at Gammon’s audacity.

“Let me recommend your lordship to be more cautious and measured in your language,” said Gammon, visibly struggling to speak with calmness—“especially concerning matters on which you are utterly—profoundly ignorant——” “I will not long remain so, Mr. Gammon; you may rely upon it,” replied the Earl with sustained firmness and hauteur.

[‘Shall I? *shall* I prostrate you, insolent old fool! soul and body?’ thought Gammon.]

“I will instantly seek out Mr. Titmouse,” continued the Earl, “and will soon get at the bottom of this—this—monstrous transaction.”

“I cannot, of course, control your lordship’s motions. If you *do* apply to Mr. Titmouse, you will in all probability receive the information you seek for—that is, if Mr. Titmouse *dare*, without first consulting me——” “If—Mr.—Titmouse—dare, sir?” echoed the Earl calmly and scornfully.

“Yes—*dare*!” furiously retorted Gammon, his eye, as it were, momentarily flashing fire. “Sir, this is very highly amusing!” said Lord Dreddlington, trying to smile; but it was impossible. His hands trembled so much that he could not draw on his glove without great effort. “To *me*, my lord, it is very—very painful,” replied Gammon, with an agitation which he could not conceal—“not painful on my own account, but your lordship’s——” “Sir, I thank you for your sympathy,” interrupted Lord Dreddlington with a faint smile. “In the meanwhile, you may depend upon my taking steps forthwith of a somewhat decisive character. We shall see, sir, how long transactions of this sort can be concealed.”

At this point, Gammon had finally determined upon making his long-dreaded disclosure to the Earl of Dreddlington—one that would instantly topple him

down headlong over the battlements of his lofty and unapproachable pride, as though he had been struck by lightning. Gammon felt himself getting colder every minute—his agitation driving the blood from his extremities back upon his heart.

"Your lordship has spoken of *concealment*," he commenced, with visible emotion.—"Your lordship's offensive and most uncalled-for observations upon my motives and conduct, irritated me for the moment—but that is gone by. They have, however, worked my feelings up to a point which will enable me, perhaps, better than on any future occasion, to make a disclosure to your lordship of a secret, that ever since it has come to my knowledge, so help me Heaven! has made me the most miserable of men." There was something in Gammon's manner that compelled the Earl to sit down again in the chair from which he had risen, and where he remained gazing in wondering silence at Gammon, who proceeded—"It is a disclosure which will require all your lordship's strength of mind to prevent its overpowering you—" "Gracious God, sir, what do you mean? What do you mean, Mr. Gammon? Go on!" said the Earl, turning very pale. "I would even now, my lord, shrink from the precipice which I have approached, and leave your lordship in ignorance of that which no earthly power can remedy; but your lordship's singular discovery of the rent-charge, which we have talked about so long and anxiously, and determination to become fully acquainted with the circumstances out of which it has arisen, leave me no option."

"Sir, I desire that, without so much circumlocution, you will come to the point. I cannot divine what you are talking about—what you meditate telling me; but I beg of you, sir, to tell me what you know, and leave me to bear it as best I can."

"Your lordship shall be obeyed, then.—I said, some little time ago, that the instrument granting me the rent-charge upon the Yatton property, recited, as a part of the consideration, my arduous, and long-continued, and successful exertions to place Mr. Titmouse in possession of that fine estate. It was I, my lord, that searched for him till I found him—the rightful heir to the Yatton estates, the possible successor to your lordship in your ancient barony. Night and day I have toiled for him—have overcome all obstacles, and at length placed him in the splendid position which he now occupies. He is not, my lord, naturally of a generous or grateful disposition, as, perhaps, your lordship also may be aware of; and had I not insisted on an adequate return for my services, he would have given me none. Therefore, I required him, nay I extorted from him the instrument in question." He paused.

"Well, sir. Go on! I hear you," said the Earl somewhat sternly; on which Gammon resumed.

"How I first acquired a knowledge that Mr. Aubrey was wrongfully enjoying the Yatton estates, does not at all concern your lordship; but one thing *does* concern your lordship to know, and me to be believed by your lordship in telling you—that, so help me, Heaven! at the time that I discovered Mr. Titmouse behind the counter of Mr. Tag-rag, in Oxford Street, and up till within a couple of months ago, I had no more doubt about his being really entitled, as heir-at-law—" The Earl gave a sudden start. "My lord, I would even now beg your lordship to let me take some other opportunity, when we are both calmer."

"Go on, sir," said the Earl firmly, but in a lower tone of voice than he had before spoken in, and sitting with his eyes riveted on those of Mr. Gammon, who was compelled by his own agitation to pause for a moment or two. Then he resumed. "I was saying, that till about two months ago, I had no more doubt than I have of your lordship's now sitting before me, that Mr. Titmouse was the legitimate descendant of the person entitled to enjoy the Yatton estates in preference to Mr. Aubrey. His pedigree was subjected to the severest scrutiny

that the law of England can devise, and was pronounced complete——” Gammon beheld Lord Dreddlington quivering all over; “but to my horror—only I know it, except Mr. Titmouse, to whom I told it—I have discovered, by a most extraordinary accident that we were, and are, all mistaken.” Lord Dreddlington had grown deadly pale, and his lips, which had lost their colour, seemed to open unconsciously, while he inclined towards Gammon; “and—I may as well tell your lordship at once the worst—this young man, Titmouse, is only a natural son, and what is worst, of a woman who had a former husband living——”

Lord Dreddlington started up from his chair, and staggered away from it, his arms moving to and fro—his face the very picture of horror. It was ghastly to look at. His lips moved, but he uttered no sound.

“Oh, my lord! For God’s sake be calm!” cried out Gammon, dreadfully shocked, rushing towards the Earl, who kept staggering back, his hands stretched out as if to keep off some approaching object. “My lord! Lord Dreddlington, hear me! For Heaven’s sake, let me bring you back to your chair. It’s only a little faintness!”—He put his arm round the Earl, endeavouring to draw him back towards the easy chair; but he felt his lordship slipping down on the floor, his legs yielding under him; then his head suddenly sank on one side, and the next moment he lay, as it were collapsed upon the floor, partly supported by Gammon, who, in a fearful state of agitation, shouted out for the laundress.

“Untie his neck handkerchief, sir; loose his shirt-collar!” cried the woman, and stooping down, while Gammon supported his head, she removed the pressure from his neck. He was breathing heavily. “For God’s sake, run off for a doctor—any one—the nearest you can find,” gasped Gammon. “The carriage standing before the inn is his lordship’s; you’ll see his footman—tell him his lordship’s in a fit, and send him off also for a doctor!”

The laundress, nearly as much agitated as her master, started off as she had been ordered. Gammon, finding no signs of returning consciousness, with a great effort managed to get his lordship into the bedroom; and had just laid him down on the bed when the footman burst into the chamber in a terrible fright. He almost jumped off the floor on catching sight of the prostrate and inanimate figure of his master, and was for a few moments so stupefied that he could not hear Gammon ordering him to start off in quest of a doctor, which, at length, however, he did,—leaving Gammon alone with his victim. For a few frightful moments, he felt as if he had murdered Lord Dreddlington, and must fly for it. He pressed his hands to his forehead, as if to recall his scattered faculties.

“What is to be done?” thought he. “Is this apoplexy? paralysis? epilepsy? or what? Will he recover?—Will it affect his reason?—*Will he recover?* If so—how deal with the damning discovery he has made? Will he have sense enough to keep his own counsel? If he recover, and preserve his reason—all is right—everything succeeds. I am his master to the end of his days! What a horrid while they are!—Curse those doctors! The wretches! never to be found when they are wanted. He’s dying before my very eyes! How shall I say this happened? A fit, brought on by agitation occasioned—(ay, that will do)—by the failure of the Company. Ah—there’s the newspaper he brought with him, and put into my hands,” he thought, as his eye glanced at the newspaper lying on the table in the adjoining room—“This will give colour to my version of the affair!” With this, he hastily seized the paper in question, and thrust it into one of the coat-pockets of Lord Dreddlington; and the moment after, in came the laundress, followed by the medical man she had gone in quest of; the door hardly having been closed before a thundering knock announced the arrival of the footman with another doctor; to both of whom Gammon with haste and

agitation gave the account of his lordship's seizure which he had previously determined upon giving to all inquirers.—“A decided case of apoplexy,” said the fat, bald-headed old gentleman brought in by the laundress, and who had been forty years in practice; and he proceeded hastily to raise the Earl into a nearly sitting posture, directing the windows to be thrown open as widely as possible. “Clearly paralysis,” said the spectacled young gentleman brought in by the footman, and who had been established in practice only a fortnight, and was hot from the hospitals, and had opened a little surgery nearly opposite to that of the old gentleman.

“It *isn't*, sir—it's apoplexy.” “Sir, it's nearer epilepsy——” “Listen to his *breathing*, sir,” said the old gentleman scornfully.

“For God's sake, gentlemen, do something!” interposed Gammon furiously—“Good God! would you have his lordship die before your eyes?”

“Put his feet into hot water instantly—get mustard plasters ready,” commenced the old gentleman in a mighty bustle, turning up his coat-sleeves, and getting out his lancets; while the young gentleman, with a very indignant air, still resolved to give the distinguished patient the advantage of the newest improvements in medical science, whipped out a stethoscope, and was screwing it together, when the old gentleman in a rage, cried “Pish!” and knocked it out of his hand: whereupon the young gentleman seemed disposed to strike him!

“Oh, my God!” cried Gammon—and, addressing the footman—“set off for Doctor Bailey instantly—these fools will let him die before their eyes!” Off sprang the man, and was out of sight in a twinkling. 'Twas very *natural* (though, I must own, somewhat inconvenient and unseemly) for these worthy rivals to behave in this way, seeing it was the first time in his life that either had been called in to a nobleman, and very probably it would be the last—at least, it ought to have been: and each wished to cure or kill the distinguished patient in his own way. 'Twas also the conflict between the old and new systems of medical science; between old practice and young speculation—and between these two stools was his lordship falling to the ground indeed. One felt the pulse, the other insisted on applying the stethoscope to his heart; one remarked on the coldness of the extremities—the other said the pupils were fixed and dilated. One was for bleeding at the arm, the other for opening the jugular vein: one for cupping at the nape of the neck—the other on the temple; one spoke of electricity—'twould stimulate the nervous system to throw off the blood from the vein;—the other said stimulate the whole surface—wrap him in a mustard plaster from head to foot, and shave and blister the head. One verily believed his lordship was dying; the other declared he was dead already, through *his* mode of treatment not having been adopted. Each would have given twenty guineas to have been the only one called in. All this horrid foolery occupied far less time than is requisite to describe it—scarce a minute or two, to be sure, and almost drove Gammon into frenzy; and, rushing to the window, he called to a porter in the inn to start off for another doctor—which brought the two to their senses, such as they were. Suffice it to say, that the jugular vein was opened in a trice; mustard plasters and hot water applied as quickly as they could be procured; and a cupping-case having been sent for, blood was taken pretty freely from the nape of the neck—and these two blood lettings saved Lord Dreddlington's life—whether to Gammon's delight or disappointment I shall not take upon me to say. By the time that the great man—the experienced and skilful king's physician, Dr. Bailey—had arrived, the Earl was beginning to exhibit slight symptoms of returning consciousness, and was recovering from an attack of partial apoplexy. Dr. Bailey remained with his lordship for nearly half an hour; and, on leaving, gave it as his opinion that, provided no fresh seizure occurred during the ensuing two hours, it would

be practicable—as it was, of course, very desirable—to remove his lordship to his own house. The period named having elapsed without any relapse, it was determined on removing his lordship, who was to be accompanied by one of the medical men—both would fain have gone had the chariot admitted of it ; but Gammon soon settled the matter by naming the eldest practitioner, and dismissing the younger with a couple of guineas. Then Gammon himself set off in a hackney-coach, about an hour before the carriage started, in order to prepare the household of the Earl, and secure a safe communication of the alarming event to the Lady Cecilia. On reaching the Earl's house, to Gammon's surprise a hackney coach was driving off from before the door ; and, on entering the house, guess his amazement at hearing from the agitated porter that Lady Cecilia had just gone upstairs in a terrible trouble. Gammon darted upstairs, unable to imagine by what means Lady Cecilia could have been apprized of the event. He found her, in out-door costume, sitting sobbing on the sofa, attended anxiously by Miss Macspleuchan. The plain fact was, that she had just been driven out of her own house by a couple of executions, put in that morning by two creditors of Titmouse, by whom they had been treated, the evening before, very insolently. Mr. Gammon's agitated appearance alarmed Miss Macspleuchan, but was not noticed by her more distressed companion ; and, as soon as Mr. Gammon found the means of doing it unobserved, he made a sign to Miss Macspleuchan that he had something of great importance to communicate to her. Leaving the Lady Cecilia, a short time afterwards, in the care of her maid, Miss Macspleuchan followed Mr. Gammon down stairs into the library, and was in a few hurried words apprized of the illness of the Earl—of the cause of it—(viz., the sudden failure of an important speculation in which the Earl was interested)—and that his lordship would be brought home in about an hour's time or so, in company with a medical man. Miss Macspleuchan was for a moment very nearly overcome, even to fainting ; but, being a woman of superior strength of character, she soon rallied, and immediately addressed herself to the necessity of warding off any sudden and violent shock from Lady Cecilia, especially with reference to her delicate state of health. It was absolutely necessary, however, that her ladyship should be promptly apprized of the painful occurrence, lest an infinitely greater shock should be inflicted on her by the Earl's arrival. Gently and gradually as Miss Macspleuchan broke the intelligence to Lady Cecilia, it occasioned her falling into a swoon—for it will be borne in mind that her nerves had been before sufficiently shaken. On recovering, she requested Mr. Gammon to be sent for, and with considerable agitation inquired into the occasion and manner of the Earl's illness. As soon as she had mentioned that it was a paragraph in the day's paper that first occasioned in the Earl the agitation which had induced such serious consequences—

“What! in the papers already? It is about that fellow Titmouse?” she inquired, with a languid air of disgust.

“No, indeed, Lady Cecilia, Mr. Titmouse has nothing to do with it,” replied Gammon, with a slight inward spasm ; and, just as he had succeeded in giving her to understand the cause to which he chose to refer the Earl's illness, carriage wheels were heard, followed in a second or two by a tremendous thundering at the door, which made even Gammon almost start from his chair, and threw Lady Cecilia into a second swoon. It was providential, perhaps, that it had that effect ; for had she gone to the windows, and seen her insensible father, with care and difficulty, lifted out of his carriage—his shirt-collar, and a white neck handkerchief, thrown round his shoulders, partially crimsoned ; and in that way, amid a little crowd gathered round, carried into the house, and borne up-stairs to his bedchamber—it might have had a very serious effect, indeed, upon her ladyship. Gammon stepped for an instant to the window—he saw

the poor old peer in the state I have described, and the sight blanched his cheeks. Leaving her ladyship in the hands of Miss Macspleuchan, and her attendants, he followed into the Earl's bedroom; and was a little relieved, some quarter of an hour afterwards, at finding that, though the Earl was much exhausted with the fatigue of removal, he was in a much more satisfactory state than could have been anticipated. As his lordship's own physician (who had been summoned instantly on the Earl's arrival home) intimated that a little repose was essential to his lordship, and that no one should remain in the room whose services were not indispensable, Gammon took his departure, after an anxious inquiry as to Lady Cecilia—intending to return before night, personally to make his inquiries concerning the Earl and her ladyship.

A mighty sigh escaped from the oppressed bosom of Gammon, as soon as, having quitted the house, he found himself in the street alone. He walked for some minutes straight on, irresolute as to whither to direct his steps—to his own chambers, to the office in Hatton Garden, or to Mr. Titmouse's residence in Park Lane. At length he determined on returning, in the first instance, to his own chambers, and changed his course accordingly; his mind so absorbed in thought that he scarcely saw any one he met or passed. *Here* was a state of things, thought he, that he had brought about! And what must be his own course now?

Here was Lord Dreddlington, in the first place, involved to a most alarming extent of liability in respect of his connection with one of the bubble companies, into an alliance with which it had been Gammon who seduced him. But he quickly lost sight of that, as a very light matter compared with what had subsequently happened, and the prodigious consequences to which it might possibly lead—and that too, immediately.

The crisis had been precipitated by an accident—an occurrence which he felt that no man could have foreseen. Certainly it might all be traced to his own oversight in leaving the conveyance of his rent-charge—so all-important a document—upon his table, though for only a minute or two's absence; for he had not quitted his chambers more than five minutes before he had re-entered them, finding the Earl of Dreddlington there—of all persons in the world the very last whom Gammon would have wished to be aware of the existence of such an instrument. Who could have imagined—calculated on such an occurrence? Never before had the Earl visited him at his own private residence; and to come just precisely at the very moment—and yet, thought Gammon, almost starting back a step or two—when one came to think of it—what was more likely than that, on seeing the paragraph in the morning paper, his lordship should have done the very thing he had, and driven down to Mr. Gammon for an explanation? Bah! thought Mr. Gammon, and stamped his foot on the pavement.

"But the thing is done; and what am I now to do? What can I do? First of all, there's Titmouse—where is that little miscreant at this moment? Will he follow his wife to Grosvenor Square? Will the Earl have recovered, before I can see Titmouse, sufficiently to recollect what has happened? Will they allow him to be admitted into the sick-chamber? Suppose his presence should remind the Earl of what he has this day heard? Suppose he should recover his senses—what course will he take? Will he acquaint his daughter that she is married to a vulgar bastard—she and he the two proudest persons, perhaps, living! Will they spurn him from them with loathing and horror?—expose the little impostor to the world?—and take, God knows what steps against *me*, for the share I have had in the matter?—Oh, impossible!—They can never blazon their own degradation to the world! Or will Lord Dreddlington have discretion and self-command sufficient to keep the secret to himself? Will he rest satisfied with my statement, or insist on proof and corroboration? Will

he call for vouchers—ah!” here he ground his teeth together, for he recollected the trick which Titmouse had played him in destroying the precious documents already spoken of, “If the little wretch do not hear of what has happened from any one else, shall I tell him that I have communicated his secret to Lord Dreddlington? Fancy him and his wife meeting after they know all!—or him and the Earl! Suppose the Earl should *die*—and without having disclosed the secret to any one? Oh, oh! what a godsend would that be! All straight then, to the end of the chapter!—How near it was this morning!—If I had but suffered those two boobies to wrangle together till it was too late!”—A *little* colour came into Mr Gammon’s cheek at this point—as if he felt that perhaps he was then going a trifle too far, in entertaining such wishes and regrets: still he could not dismiss the reflection; nay, what was more probable than that so desperate a shock, suffered by a man of his advanced years, might be only the precursor of a second and fatal fit of apoplexy?—Doctor Bailey expressed some fears of that sort to-day, recollected Gammon!

If Mr. Gammon had seen the watchful eyes at that moment settled upon him, by two persons who were approaching him, and who passed him unobserved; and could have dreamed of the errand which had brought these two persons into that part of the town—it might have set his busy brain upon quite a new track of harassing conjecture and apprehension. But he was far too intently occupied with his thoughts to see any one, as he walked slowly down Holborn; and some five minutes afterwards, having got to within a hundred yards of Saffron Hill, he was startled out of his meditations by hearing a voice calling out his name—and looking towards the middle of the street, whence the sound came, beheld Mr. Titmouse, calling and beckoning to him eagerly, out of a hackney-coach, which was slowly driving up Holborn, and at Titmouse’s bidding drew up to the kerb-stone.

“Oh—I say!—Mr. Gammon!—’pon my life—*here’s* a precious mess!—Such a devil of a row!”—commenced Titmouse alarmedly, speaking in a low voice through the coach window. “What, sir?” inquired Gammon sternly. “Why—eh? heard of it? Lady Cicely——” “I *have* heard of it, sir,” replied Gammon gloomily—“and I have, in my turn, something of far greater consequence to tell you. Let the coachman turn back and drive you to my chambers, where I will meet you in a quarter of an hour’s time.” “Oh Lord! Won’t you get in and tell me *now*?—Do, Mr. Gam——” “No, sir!” replied Gammon sternly and walked away, leaving Titmouse in a pretty fright.

“Now, shall I tell him, or not?” thought Gammon; and after some minutes’ anxious consideration, determined on doing so—and on threatening him, that if he did not change his courses, so far as money went, he—Gammon—would instantly blast him, by exposure of his real character and circumstances to the whole world. What might be the actual extent of his embarrassments, Gammon knew not, nor was he aware of the fact that Titmouse was at that moment getting into the hands of swindling money-lenders. In point of dress and manners Titmouse was the same that he had ever been, since fortune had given him the means of dressing according to his fancy, and the fashion; but any one looking at his face, could see in the slightly bloodshot eye, his jaded expression, and the puffy appearance of his face, the results of systematic excess and debauchery. When Gammon joined him at his chambers, and told him the events of the day, Titmouse exhibited affright, that to any other beholder than one so troubled as Gammon, would have appeared ludicrous; but as that gentleman’s object was to subdue and terrify his companion into an implicit submission to his will, he dismissed him for the day, simply enjoining him to keep away from Grosvenor Square and Park Lane till the ensuing morning—by which time events might determine the course which Gammon should dictate to Titmouse. At that time Gammon was strongly inclined to insist on Titmouse’s

going to the Continent for a little while, to be out of harm's way ; but, in fact, he felt dreadfully embarrassed to know how to dispose of Titmouse—regarding him with feelings somewhat, perhaps, akin to those with which Frankenstein beheld his monster.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BUT to return to Lord Dreddlington. The remedies resorted to so speedily after his seizure at Mr. Gammon's chambers, had most materially counteracted the effects of the terrible shock which he had sustained, and which, but for such interference, would in all probability have proved fatal. Shortly after his removal to his own house, he sank into tranquil sleep which continued, with a few interruptions, for several hours, during which his brain recovered itself, in a considerable measure, from the sudden and temporary pressure which had been upon it. Towards seven o'clock in the evening, there were sitting, on one side of the bed Miss Macspleuchan, and on the other the Lady Cecilia—who had also rallied from the shock which she had sustained, and now, occasionally shedding tears, sat gazing in melancholy silence at the countenance of her father. She was certainly a miserable young woman, was Lady Cecilia—ignorant though she might be of the real extent of disaster consequent upon her alliance with Titmouse, whom she had long hated and despised, on all occasions avoiding his company. Their almost total estrangement was quite notorious in society. His lordship's physician had quitted the chamber for a few minutes, to make arrangements for continuing with him during the night ; and neither Miss Macspleuchan nor Lady Cecilia had spoken for some time. At length the Earl, who had become rather restless, faintly muttered at intervals to himself the words—

"Bubble—villain—Blackwall——" "You see," whispered Miss Macspleuchan, "what's he thinking of. He dined with those people you know." Lady Cecilia nodded in silence. Presently his lordship resumed—"Account closed!—Call on Mr. Gammon.—Is Mr. Gammon at home——?"

The current of his recollections had now brought him to the point of danger ; and after pausing for a moment, a troubled expression came over his face—he was evidently realizing the commencement of the terrible scene in Mr. Gammon's room—then he seemed to have lost the train of his thoughts for a while, as his features slowly resumed their previous placidity ; but the troubled expression presently returned : his lips were suddenly compressed, and his brow corrugated, as if with the emotion of anger or indignation.

"Monstrous! *Two thousand pounds?*" He spoke these words in a much stronger voice than those preceding. "Oh, dear!—I should have thought his lordship had lost much more than *that*," whispered Miss Macspleuchan in a low tone. "Insist!—Titmouse—Titmouse," his lips slightly quivered, and he paused for a while. "Shocking! What *will* she——" an expression of agony came over his face. "Poor papa! He's evidently heard it all!" whispered Lady Cecilia faintly.

"Hush!" exclaimed Miss Macspleuchan, raising her finger to her lips—adding presently, "If he goes on in this way, I shall go and fetch Dr. Whittington in."

"Cecilia!—Cecilia!" continued the Earl ; and suddenly opening his eyes, gazed forward, and then on each side, with a dull confused stare. Then he closed them, muttering—"I certainly thought Mr. Gammon was here!" Shortly afterwards he opened them again ; and his head being inclined towards the side where Lady Cecilia was sitting, they fell upon, and seemed to be

arrested by her countenance. After gazing at her for some moments with a very, very sorrowful expression, he again closed his eyes, murmuring—"Poor Cecilia!"

"I really think, my dear, you'd better leave the room," faltered Miss Macspleuchan; imagining, from the state of her own feelings, that those of Lady Cecilia would be overpowering her—for nothing could be more soul-touching than the tone in which the Earl had last spoken.

"No; he's asleep again," replied Lady Cecilia calmly—and for a quarter of an hour all was again silent. Then the Earl sighed; and, opening his eyes, looked full at Lady Cecilia, and with a more natural expression.

"Kiss me, Cecilia," said he gently; and raising both his arms a little, while she leaned forward and kissed his forehead, he very feebly placed them round her, but they almost immediately sank upon the bed again, as if he had not strength to keep them extended.

"We will live together, Cecilia, again," murmured the Earl. "Dear papa, don't distress yourself; if you do, I really must go away from you." "No, no; you must not, Cecilia," murmured the Earl sadly and faintly, and shaking his head.

"Have you seen him to-day?" he presently asked, with a little more energy, as if he were becoming more and more thoroughly awake, and aware of his position; and there was a marked difference in the expression of his eye—partly perplexed, partly alarmed. "No, papa—I left the moment it happened, and came here; and have been here ever since. "Do, dear papa, be calm!" added Lady Cecilia, with perfect composure. "There!—I am gone blind again," said the Earl suddenly, and raised his trembling hands to his eyes.

"So you know it all?" said he presently, tremulously removing his hands, and looking up, as if the momentary obscuration of his sight had ceased. "Oh yes, papa, of course! How could I help it? Try to go to sleep, again, dear papa." There was a faint dash of petulance in her manner.

They were at terrible cross purposes.

His eye remained fixed steadily on that of his daughter. "Is it not horrible, Cecilia?" said he, with a shudder.

"Dear papa, I don't know what you mean," replied Cecilia, quite startled by the tone of his voice, and at the expression of his eye. There was nothing wild or unnatural about it. The eye seemed that of a man in his full senses, but horrified by some frightful recollection or other.

"I thought it would have killed her," he muttered, closing his eyes, while a faint flush came over his face, but that of Lady Cecilia turned deadly pale.

"Don't speak again, dear," whispered Miss Macspleuchan, herself a little startled by the Earl's manner—"he's wandering a little; he'll go to sleep presently."

"Yes, in my grave, madam," replied the Earl gravely, and speaking in a stronger voice than he had yet spoken in—at the same time turning towards Miss Macspleuchan an eye that suddenly blanched her face. She gazed at him in silence and apprehensively. There ensued a pause of a minute or two.

"Oh, Cecilia!" said the Earl presently, shaking his head, and looking at her with the same terrible expression that had so startled her before—"that I had first followed you to your grave!" "My dear papa, you are only dreaming!" "No, I am not. Oh! how can *you*, Cecilia, be so calm here, when you know that you have married a——"

Lady Cecilia glanced hurriedly at Miss Macspleuchan, who, having risen a little from her chair, was leaning forward in an agitated manner, and straining her ears to catch every word—"What are you talking about, papa?" gasped Lady Cecilia, while her face became of a deadly whiteness.

"Why, I thought you knew it all," said the Earl, sustained and stimulated

by the intensity of his feelings—"that this Titmouse—is—Mr. Gammon has acknowledged all—an infamous impostor—an illegitimate——"

Miss Macspleuchan, with a faint shriek, rang the bell at the bed-head violently; but before she or any one else could reach her, Lady Cecilia had fallen heavily on the floor, where she lay insensible, her maid falling down over her as she rushed into the room, alarmed by the sudden violent ringing of the bell. All was confusion and horror. Lady Cecilia was instantly carried out insensible; the Earl was found to have been seized with a second fit of apoplexy. Dr. Bailey was quickly in attendance, followed soon after by an eminent accoucheur, whom it had been found necessary to send for, Lady Cecilia's illness having assumed the most alarming character conceivable. When Miss Macspleuchan had in some measure recovered from her distraction, she dispatched a servant to implore the instant attendance of the Duke and Duchess of Tantallan, unable to bear the overwhelming horror occasioned to her by the statement of the Earl of Dreddlington; and which, whether so astounding and frightful a statement was founded in fact or not, or only a delusion of the Earl's, was likely to have given the unfortunate Lady Cecilia her deathblow.

Both the Duke and Duchess—the nearest relatives of the Earl then in London (the Duke being his brother-in-law)—were, within half an hour, at Lord Dreddlington's, and made acquainted with the fearful occasion of what had happened. The Duke and Duchess were quite as proud and haughty people as Lord Dreddlington; but the Duke was a *little* the Earl's superior in point of understanding. When first told of the Earl's disclosure, he was told it as if it were an ascertained fact; and his horror knew no bounds. But when he came to inquire into the matter and found that it rested on no other foundation than the wanderings of a man labouring under the effects of an apoplectic seizure, he began to feel a great relief; especially when Miss Macspleuchan could mention no single circumstance corroboratory of so amazing a representation. At her suggestion, the Duke, who could be of no service to the Earl, who was in the hands of the physicians, hurried home again, and sent off a special messenger to Mr. Gammon, whose address Miss Macspleuchan had given him, with the following note:

"The Duke of Tantallan presents his compliments to Mr. Gammon, and most earnestly begs that he will, without a moment's delay, favour the Duke with a call in Portman Square, on business of the last importance.

"Portman Square,
"Wednesday Evening, 9 o'clock."

A huge servant of the Duke's—with powdered hair, silver epaulets, dark crimson coat, and white breeches, having altogether a most splendid appearance—created something like a sensation in the immediate neighbourhood of Thavies' Inn, by inquiring, with a very impatient and excited air, for "Thavies' Inn," and "a gentleman of the name of *Gammon*," who was very naturally supposed to be honoured by some special and direct communication from the king, or at least some member of the royal family. Gammon himself—who was in the act of opening his door to go out and make his promised call of inquiry in Grosvenor Square—was flustered, for a moment, on finding himself stepping into the arms of such an imposing personage; who said, as he gave him the letter, on finding him to be Mr. Gammon—"From the Duke of Tantallan, sir. His grace, I believe, expects you immediately, sir."

Mr. Gammon hastily opened the letter, and having glanced at the contents—"Give my compliments to his grace, and say I will attend him immediately," said he. The man withdrew, and Gammon returned into his chamber, and sat for a few moments in the darkness—he having just before put out his

lamp. He burst into a cold sweat—"What's in the wind now!" said he to himself. "Ah, why did I not ask the fellow?"—and starting from his seat, he rushed downstairs, and succeeded in calling back the Duke's servant just as he was turning out of the inn—"Do you happen to have been into Grosvenor Square to-day?—And do you know how the Earl of Dreddlington is?" inquired Gammon anxiously.

"Yes, sir; his lordship, and the Lady Cecilia Titmouse, are both dangerously ill. I believe his lordship, sir, has had a stroke—they say it's the second he's had to day—and her ladyship is taken in labour, and is in a shocking bad way, sir. The Duke and Duchess were sent for in a dreadful hurry about an hour ago."

"Dear! I'm sorry to hear it! Thank you," replied Gammon, hastily turning away a face that he felt must have gone of a ghastly paleness.

"It may be only to inquire about the Artificial Rain Company"—said Gammon to himself, as, having procured a light, he poured himself out a small glass of brandy and drank it off, to overcome a little sense of faintness which he felt coming rapidly over him. "The Duke is a shareholder, I think. Not at all unlikely!—And as for Lady Cecilia's illness—nothing so extraordinary about it—when one considers her situation—and the shock occasioned by the Earl's sudden and alarming illness! But I must take a decided course, one way or another, with the Duke?—Suppose the Earl has disclosed the affair to Lady Cecilia—and it has got to the Duke's ears?—Good Heavens! how is one to deal with it? Suppose I were to affect total ignorance of the thing—and swear that it is altogether a delusion on the part of the Earl?—That would be rather a bold stroke, too!—Suppose the Earl to die of this bout—ah! then there's an end of the thing, and all's well, provided I can manage Titmouse!—A second fit of apoplexy within twelve hours—humph!—If the Earl has mentioned the thing—and distinctly and intelligibly—ohow far has he gone?—Did he name the rent-charge?—Ah!—well, and suppose he did? What's easier than also to deny *that* altogether? But suppose Titmouse should be tampered with, and pressed about the business? Perdition!—all is lost!—Yet they would hardly like to defy me, and trumpet the thing abroad!—Then there's the other course—to own that I am in possession of the fatal secret—that I became so only recently; and avow the reason of my taking the rent-charge; and insist upon retaining it, as the condition of my secrecy! That also is a bold stroke: both are bold!—Yet one of them I must choose! Then, suppose the Earl to recover; he will never be the same man he was—that I find is always the case—his mind, such as it is, will go nearly altogether!—But if he recovers a glimmering of sense—egad! 'twill require a little nerve, too, to deny the thing to his face, and swear that the whole thing is a delusion of a brain disordered by previous fright!—And suppose Lady Cecilia dies?—and leaves no issue? and then Lord Dreddlington follows her—by Heavens, this hideous little devil becomes *Lord Drelincourt at once!*"

This was the way that Mr. Gammon turned the thing over in his mind, as he rapidly walked towards Portman Square; and by the time that he had reached the Duke's house he had finally determined on the course he should pursue: and though his face was rather pale, he was perfectly self-possessed and firm, at the moment of his being shown into the library, where the Duke was walking about, impatient for his arrival.

"Gracious God, sir!"—commenced the Duke in a low tone, with much agitation of manner, the moment that the servant had closed the door behind him—"what is all this horrible news we hear about Mr. Titmouse?" "*Horrible news*—about Mr. Titmouse?" echoed Gammon amazedly—"pardon me—I don't understand your Grace! If you allude to the two *executions*, which I'm sorry to hear——" "Pho, sir! you are trifling! Believe me, this is a very

awful moment to all persons involved in what has taken place!" replied the Duke, his voice quivering with emotion. "Your grace will excuse me, but I *really* cannot comprehend you!—" "You soon shall, sir! I tell you, it may be a matter of infinite moment to yourself personally, Mr. Gammon!" "What *does* your grace mean?" inquired Gammon respectfully, but firmly—and throwing an expression of still greater amazement into his face. "Mean, sir? By——! that you've killed my Lord Dreddlington, and the Lady Cecilia," cried the Duke, in a violent manner. "I wait to hear, as soon as your grace may condescend to explain," said Gammon calmly. "Explain, sir? Why I have *already* told and explained everything!" replied the choleric Duke, who imagined that he really *had* done so. "Your Grace has told—has explained nothing whatever," said Gammon. "Why, sir—I mean, what's this horrible story you've been telling my Lord Dreddlington about Mr. Titmouse being—in plain English, sir—a *bastard*?"

If the Duke had struck at Gammon, the latter could not have started back more suddenly and violently than he did on hearing his grace utter the last word; and he remained gazing at the Duke with a face full of horror and bewilderment. The spectacle which he presented arrested the Duke's increasing excitement. He stared with amazement. "Why, sir, are we both—are we all—mad? or dreaming? or what has come to us?"

"I think," replied Gammon, a little recovering from the sort of stupor into which the Duke's words had apparently thrown him, "it is I who have a better title than your grace to ask the question! I tell Lord Dreddlington that Mr. Titmouse is a bastard! Why, I can hardly credit my ears! Does my Lord Dreddlington say that I have told him so?" "He does, sir!" replied the Duke fiercely. "And what else may his lordship have said concerning me?" inquired Gammon, with a sort of hopeless smile. "By Heaven, sir, you mustn't treat this matter lightly!" said the Duke impetuously. "May I ask your grace whether this is the matter mentioned in your grace's note, as of the——" "It is, sir! it is!—and it's killed my Lord Dreddlington—and also the Lady Cecilia!" "What!" cried Gammon, starting and exhibiting increasing amazement—"does *her ladyship*, too, say that I have told her so?" "Yes, sir; she does!" "What, Lady Cecilia!" echoed Gammon, really confounded. "Well, sir—I think she did——" "*Think*, your grace!" interrupted Gammon, bitterly and reproachfully. "Well, sir—certainly the fact is, I may be mistaken as to *that* matter. I was not present; but, at all events, my Lord Dreddlington certainly says you told *him*—and he's told Lady Cecilia—and it's killing her—it is, sir!—By Heavens, sir, I expect hourly to hear of both of their deaths!—And I beg to ask you, sir, once for all, have you ever made any such statement to my Lord Dreddlington?"

"Not a syllable—never a breath of the sort in all my life!" replied Gammon boldly, and rather sharply, as if indignant at being pressed about so absurd a matter. "What—nothing of the sort? or to that effect?" exclaimed the Duke with mingled amazement and incredulity.

"Certainly—certainly not!—But let me ask, in my turn, is the *fact* so? Does your grace mean to say that——" "No, sir," interrupted the Duke but not speaking in his former confident tone—"but my Lord Dreddlington does!"

"Oh, impossible! impossible!" cried Gammon, with an incredulous air—"Only consider for one moment—how could the fact possibly be so and I not know it! Why, I know every step of his pedigree!" The Duke drummed vehemently with his finger on the table, and stared at Gammon with the air of a man suddenly and completely nonplussed.

"Why, Mr. Gammon, then my Lord Dreddlington must have completely lost his senses! He declares that you told him that such was the fact!—When and where, may I ask, did you first see him to-day?" "About half-past eleven or

twelve o'clock, when he called at my chambers in a state of the greatest agitation and excitement, occasioned by the announcement in this morning's paper of the sudden blow-up of the Artificial—" Good heaven! why, is *that* gone?" interrupted his grace, eagerly and alarmedly. "When? why? how?—By heaven, it's enough to turn any one's head!" "Indeed it is, your grace. My Lord Dreddlington was the first from whom I heard anything on the subject." "It's very odd I didn't see the paragraph! Where was it? In the *Morning Grawl*?" "It was, your grace—it stated that Sir Sharper Bubble had suddenly absconded, with all the funds of—"

"Oh, the villain! Why do you make such people chairmen, and treasurers, and so forth? How must the loss be made good? You really don't look sharp enough after people whom you put into such situations! Who the deuce is this fellow—this Sir Bubble Sharper, or Sir Sharper Bubble?" "He was greatly respected in the City, or would not have been in the situation he was. Who could have suspected it?" "And is the thing quite blown up? All gone?" "Yes, I fear it is indeed!" replied Gammon, shrugging his shoulders and sighing.

"Of course no one can be made liable—come the worst to the worst, eh?" inquired the Duke very anxiously, "beyond the amount of his shares? How's that, Mr. Gammon?" "I devoutly trust not! Your grace sees it depends a good deal on the prominence which any one takes in the affair." "Egad! is that the principle? Then, I assure you, Mr. Gammon, I have not, for my part, taken the least public part in the proceedings—" "I am very happy to hear it, your grace! Nor have I—but I very much fear that my Lord Dreddlington may have gone further a good deal—" "I've several times warned him on the subject, I assure you! By the way, there's that other affair, Mr. Gammon, I hope—eh?—that the Gunpowder and Fresh Water—" "Good heavens, your grace! I hope all is right *there*—or I, for one, am a ruined man!" replied Gammon quickly.

"I—I—hope so too, sir. So Lord Dreddlington was a good deal shocked, eh, this morning?" "Yes, indeed, he was—nay, most alarmingly excited! I was greatly alarmed on his account, directly I saw him."

"And is this Mr. Titmouse—eh?—involved in the thing?" "I really can't tell, your grace—his movements are somewhat eccentric—it's extremely difficult to discover or account for them! By the way, I recollect now that I *did* mention his name to Lord Dreddlington." "Ah, indeed? What about?" interrupted his grace briskly. "Why, I just heard that early this morning there would be one or two executions put into his house—he's been going on lately in a very wild way." "Oh, he's a monstrous little—but was that all that passed between you and my Lord Dreddlington about him?" "I will undertake to say," replied Gammon pausing, putting his finger to his lips, and trying to recollect—"that that was the only mention made of his name, for soon after his lordship was seized with a fit," and Mr. Gammon proceeded to give the Duke a very vivid and feeling description of it.

"What a singular hallucination his lordship must be labouring under, to make such an assertion concerning me as he appears to have made!" presently observed Gammon.

"Very!" replied the Duke gravely, still feeling serious misgivings on the subject; but what could he say or do further, after the solemn, the explicit, and repeated denials of Mr. Gammon? His grace then gave him an account of what he had heard as to the mode of Lord Dreddlington's seizure, and that of Lady Cecilia; and as he went on, Gammon quivered from top to toe, and it required all his extraordinary powers of self-command to conceal his excessive agitation from the Duke.

"By the way, where is Mr. Titmouse?" inquired the Duke, as he rose, after

saying that he was going on immediately to Grosvenor Square. "I have sent to Park Lane, and find that he has not been there since the morning."

"I really don't know, I assure your grace. I have not seen him for several days? *If his* affairs are so seriously involved as your grace would intimate, he may probably be keeping out of the way."

"Do let me beg of you to take the trouble of inquiring after him to-morrow morning, Mr. Gammon. He must be very much shocked to hear of the lamentable condition of Lady Cecilia!"

"Indeed I will, I assure your grace: I only hope he may not have gone over to the Continent."

"God bless my soul, but I hope not!" interrupted the Duke earnestly: and added, after one or two other observations, "then I understand you as stating, Mr. Gammon, that there is not the least pretence or foundation, in point of fact, for the representation which my Lord Dreddlington has made concerning you, with reference to Mr. Titmouse—excuse me—is it so, upon your word of honour?"

"Upon my sacred word of honour!" replied Gammon steadfastly; and bowing to the Duke, took his leave, promising to call on his grace early on the morrow, and to make every exertion to see Mr. Titmouse—whom Mr. Gammon was now, indeed, devouringly anxious to see, and would have made almost any sacrifice to be enabled to fall in with him that very night. Good Heavens! how much now depended on Titmouse!—on the manner in which he would deal with such questions as would infallibly be asked of him by the Duke, and by any one else who might have heard of the rumour! In short, Gammon was quite distracted by doubts and fears, as he bent his way back to his chambers, not venturing, after what he had heard, to call in Grosvenor Square that evening, lest he should hear fatal news of either the Earl or Lady Cecilia—that is, of either or both of his *victims*! The next morning, the following announcement of the Earl's illness appeared in most of the morning papers, and created quite a sensation in society:—

SUDDEN AND ALARMING ILLNESS OF THE EARL OF DREDDLINGTON AND LADY CECILIA TITMOUSE.—Yesterday, while sitting in the office of his solicitor, the Earl of Dreddlington experienced an apoplectic seizure of a most serious nature, and which, but for the most prompt and decisive medical treatment, must have proved immediately fatal. His lordship rallied sufficiently during the course of the day to admit of his being conveyed to his house in Grosvenor Square, but in the evening experienced a second and still more alarming fit, and continues in a state which is calculated to excite the greatest apprehension. We regret also to add, that Lady Cecilia Titmouse, his lordship's only daughter, happening to be with his lordship at the moment of his sudden seizure, was immediately seized with illness, which, in her ladyship's critical state of health, may be attended with most serious consequences."

In the evening papers, it was stated that the Earl of Dreddlington still continued in a precarious condition, and that Lady Cecilia was not expected to survive the night; and the instant that Mr. Gammon laid his hands on the next morning's paper, he turned with eagerness and trepidation to a particular gloomy corner of it—and a faint momentary mist came over his eyes, while he read as follows:—

"Yesterday, in Grosvenor Square, in her 29th year, after giving premature birth to a son, still-born, Lady Cecilia Titmouse, the lady of Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq., M.P., and only daughter and heiress of the Right Honourable the Earl of Dreddlington." Mr. Gammon laid down the paper, and for some moments felt overcome with a deadly faintness. Having, however, recovered himself a little, on casting a hasty apprehensive glance over the paper for intelligence of the Earl of Dreddlington, he read as follows:—

"The Earl of Dreddlington, we regret to say, continues alarmingly ill. Drs.

Bailey and Whittington are in constant attendance upon his lordship. Our readers will see, in another part of our paper, the melancholy announcement of the death of his lordship's lovely and accomplished daughter, Lady Cecilia Titmouse, after giving premature birth to a son, still-born. We regret to hear it rumoured, that the illness of his lordship originated in a shock occasioned by circumstances of a very painful nature; but this report, we trust, will turn out to be unfounded. In the event of his lordship's demise, he is succeeded in his titles and estates by his son-in-law, and heir, upon the death of the Lady Cecilia, Mr. Titmouse, M.P. for Yatton."

It will surely be a relief to one's feelings to pass away, for a while at least, from the contemplation of these events of untoward and disastrous issue, to persons and to incidents of a very different character. Turn, therefore, kind and patient reader! your eye to that retreat of long-suffering virtue which is to be found in Vivian Street. Relieved from the *immediate* pressure which had, as it were, forced him down into the very dust, poor Aubrey's pious and well-disciplined mind was not long in recovering that tone of confident reliance upon the goodness and mercy of God, which that God had seen fit so severely to try; and such as He now permitted Aubrey to see had been His object. He and his lovely—his beloved wife and sister, soon recovered a considerable measure of composure, and even cheerfulness; yet felt they all *in the deep waters*. The generous and timely interference of Mr. Runnington had secured them, indeed, a few months' respite from the harassing and tormenting attacks of those who seemed bent upon their destruction; but what was to become of them all when the arrival of the next term should have again set into motion against them the dismal machinery of the law?

The one of all the recent occurrences which had most shocked and disheartened Mr. Aubrey, and driven him nearest to the verge of downright despair, was that of Lady Stratton's death, and its afflicting concomitants. How powerfully and perseveringly did the Arch-enemy of mankind represent this circumstance to him—especially in those moods of depression which are incident to all of us in this fluctuating scene of trial and suffering—as proof that he was the sport of chance, the victim of evil destiny!

Certainly, the event alluded to baffled all his calculations, long, and deeply, and anxiously as he reflected upon it, in all its bearings—and his only refuge lay in the simple reference of it to the all-wise providence of God. Thus was it that Aubrey, as he had not presumed in his prosperity, so despaired not in his adversity.

He had commenced a sedulous attendance at the chambers of Mr. Mansfield, within a few days after the kindness of Mr. Runnington had afforded him the means of doing so. He already knew sufficient to charm him with the intricate but exquisite system of the law of real property; and the immediate practical operation of its principles, which he witnessed in his new scene of study, served to enhance his estimate of its importance and value. Mr. Mansfield had recommended him to address his early and close attention to the incomparable essay of Mr. Fearne, upon *Contingent Remainders*. He did so, and was soon enchanted with the simplicity, subtlety, and comprehensiveness of the system developed in that masterly performance. In addition to his absorbing professional labours, he continued his occasional contributions to substantial literature; but Mr. Runnington's generosity had enabled him to dispense with that severe and incessant exertion to which he had been till then accustomed, and enabled him to address himself to his difficult yet delightful studies with unimpaired energy.

Some short time after he had commenced his attendance at Mr. Mansfield's chambers, Mr. Aubrey was, one morning about ten o'clock, on his way down to Lincoln's Inn, and when about to cross Piccadilly, paused to let pass him a

dusty post-chaise and four, dashing up St. James's Street; and as it went close and rapidly by him, he quite started with astonishment, for, unless his eye had extraordinarily deceived him, he had seen in the chaise no other a person than Lord De la Zouch, who, however, if it *were* he, had not appeared to see Mr. Aubrey, and probably had really not observed him.

"Why, how can this be?" thought Aubrey, standing and gazing for a moment in astonishment after the post-chaise. "The letter which Agnes had the other day from Lady De la Zouch, did not say a word about Lord De la Zouch's intention to return to England! And alone!—And in a post-chaise—and travelling all night, as he evidently has, from Dover! 'Tis strange! What can be the matter?"—And he stood for a moment irresolute whether or not he should retrace his steps, and satisfy his curiosity by calling at the house of Lord De la Zouch, in Dover Street. On consideration, however, he determined not to do so. He might be mistaken; but if not, Lord de la Zouch might have been called back to England on a matter of special urgency, and possibly deem a call from any one, except those he expected to see, intrusive. Aubrey, therefore, continued his way on to Lincoln's Inn; and was very soon engrossed with the matters there requiring his attention. But it really *was* Lord De la Zouch whom he had seen; and it was solely on Aubrey's own account that his lordship, leaving Lady De la Zouch at Paris, had taken this sudden journey to England—not intending Aubrey, however, at all events at present to be apprized of the fact. 'Twas entirely owing to the unconscious Gammon that Lord De la Zouch thus made his appearance in England; for, had that gentleman not taken such special pains to have inserted in the *Morning Chronicle*, the full and accurate account of the proceedings which he had caused to be instituted against himself, which his lordship in due course read at Paris, with infinite anxiety and alarm on the score of its possible bearing upon Mr. Aubrey, his lordship would in all probability have continued at Paris for several months longer, in total ignorance of the thralldom of the unfortunate Aubreys. The moment that his lordship had read over the report in question, he wrote off to Mr. Runnington a strictly confidential letter, begging an immediate answer, with as full and exact an account of Mr. Aubrey's circumstances as Mr. Runnington could give. By the very next post, that gentleman wrote off to his lordship a long letter, acquainting him with what had befallen the persecuted Aubrey, viz.—his double arrest, and in respect of so terrible a liability. Mr. Runnington spoke in very glowing and feeling terms of the manly fortitude of Mr. Aubrey under his accumulated misfortunes; and, in short, drew so moving a picture of the deplorable circumstances in which Mr. Aubrey and his family were plunged, that his lordship the next day wrote off to inform Mr. Runnington, in confidence, that he might expect to see his lordship in London within a day or two—for that he was coming over solely on the affairs of the Aubreys—and was, in fact, resolved upon bringing about, cost what it might, either alone, or in conjunction with such other friends of Mr. Aubrey as his lordship might think proper to take into his counsels, a complete settlement of Mr. Aubrey's affairs, and so place him at once and for ever out of the reach of all his enemies; to set him once more straight and free in the world, and give him a fair chance of securing, by the successful practice of the profession of the bar, dependence, affluence, and distinction. As soon as his lordship had recovered from the fatigues of his journey, he sent off a servant to request the immediate attendance of Mr. Runnington—who was overjoyed at receiving the summons, and could hardly refrain from stepping over to Mr. Mansfield's, in order to apprise Mr. Aubrey of the arrival of Lord De la Zouch. He abstained, however, from doing so, on recollecting the strict injunctions of Lord De la Zouch; and immediately set off for Dover Street. But before they met, let me take the opportunity of

mentioning one or two little matters connected with the previous movements of Mr. Runnington.

He was a very able man; clear-headed, cautious, experienced, and singularly prompt and determined, when once he had resolved on any course of proceeding: in short, he was quite capable of contending against even such a formidable opponent as Gammon, subtle, tortuous, and unscrupulous as he might be. Let me once *get hold* of Master Gammon—that's all!"—thought, very frequently, Mr. Runnington. Now, the astounding avowal which Miss Aubrey represented Mr. Gammon as having made to her, in his insane attempt to prevail upon her to entertain his addresses—viz. that he possessed the power of immediately, and, by legal means, displacing Mr. Titmouse, and repossessing Mr. Aubrey, of Yatton—had made a profound impression on the mind of Mr. Runnington. The more that he reflected upon the incident—and upon the character of Mr. Gammon, the stronger became his conviction that Mr. Gammon had been in earnest in what he had said; that there was a foundation in fact for his assertion; and that if so, some scheme of profound and infernal wickedness must have been had recourse to, in order to dispossess Mr. Aubrey of Yatton, and place Titmouse there in his stead. Then Mr. Runnington adverted, in his own mind, to the circumstance of Mr. Gammon's exercising such a constant interference and control over Titmouse, and all matters connected with Yatton. Mr. Runnington many and many a time pondered these things in his mind—but was, after all, completely at a loss to know what steps to take, and how to deal with the affair. Then again with reference to the death of Lady Stratton, and the melancholy circumstances attending it, Mr. Runnington had entered into a correspondence with Mr. Parkinson, with a view to ascertaining the chances there were of procuring his draft of Lady Stratton's will to be admitted to probate; and laid the correspondence, in the shape of a case, before an eminent practitioner in the ecclesiastical court. The opinion he thus obtained was, however, adverse; mainly, on the ground that there was clearly evidence to show a subsequent essential alteration of intention on the part of Lady Stratton—to say nothing of certain other difficulties which were suggested in the opinion. Mr. Runnington was much chagrined at this result; and, of course, abandoned his intention of seriously contesting Mr. Titmouse's claim to administration. It could, however, he thought, do no harm if he was just to lodge a *caveat*, even if he there left the matter. It might have the effect of interposing some delay, and staving off any contemplated proceedings upon the bond which Mr. Aubrey had given to the late Lady Stratton. This step, therefore, he took—and was greatly delighted in finding, some short time afterwards, that the Vulture Company were bent on pursuing their ordinary course in cases of policies which rendered it worth their while, viz., not paying till they were forced to do so:—and the Company, in their turn, were delighted to find that there was a chance of a protracted dispute concerning the right to the policy. Not satisfied with this—still haunted by Mr. Gammon's mysterious statement to Miss Aubrey—it all at once occurred to Mr. Runnington, in the course of one of his many meditations upon the subject, to take an opportunity of discussing the affair, in all its bearings, with Sir Charles Wolstenholme, whose penetrating, practical sagacity, sharpened by his zeal and sympathy, might hit upon something or other undiscernible to Mr. Runnington. Without having intimated his intentions to Mr. Aubrey, Mr. Runnington, shortly after having lodged his *caveat*, succeeded in obtaining an interview with Sir Charles, expressly with a view of talking over the affairs of the unfortunate Mr. Aubrey.

"God bless my soul!" cried Sir Charles, in a tone of wonder, as soon as Mr. Runnington had mentioned the statement of Mr. Gammon to Miss Aubrey, and the circumstances accompanying it. In short, it was clear that Sir Charles was

every whit as much struck with the circumstance as had been Mr. Runnington, and for some minutes after Mr. Runnington had named it, seemed lost in thought. A considerable pause here ensued in their conversation; and Mr. Runnington was quite delighted to see his distinguished companion evidently engaged in turning about the facts of the case in his clear and powerful understanding; viewing them from every point in which they could be contemplated and in all their bearings.

"It's very likely, I am disposed to think, that the fellow was in earnest," at length said Sir Charles; "at all events that he *believed* he possessed the power he professed to possess; and that he was hurried away a little in prematurely disclosing it. Egad, he's a nice person, that Gammon, too, by the way to think of his proposing to sweet, pretty Miss Aubrey—ah, hah," he added, with a faint but contemptuous smile; and presently subjoined, in a musing sort of way—"I've got the general facts that came out at the trial pretty fresh in my mind, and I've been just running over the links in his chain of proof. 'Gad! we could hardly have failed to detect a hitch, if there had been one! Link by link we went over it—and were long enough about it, at any rate! I can conceive, too, that in a case of that sort there was room for a little bit of perjury, if it were cleverly managed; and Mr. Gammon *is* a *clever* man! By the way, I'm actually going down special for him to York, in that bribery case, ah, hah! Ay," he presently resumed, "I suspect that one or two of the links in that chain of his must have been of base metal. Devil take him! he must have done it well, too!" He smiled bitterly.

"If *that's* your impression, Sir Charles," said Mr. Runnington eagerly, "what do you think of having a shot at them—a second ejectionment!" "Oh, by heaven! *that's* an awful affair!" replied Sir Charles, shaking his head, and looking very serious; "besides, what he's done once, he may do again." "Ah, but we know all his witnesses now beforehand! Then we fought him in the dark; but now——" "Ay, there's something in *that*, certainly," said Sir Charles musingly; "but then 'tis such a frightful expense; and where poor Aubrey's to get the means——" "Oh, never mind that, Sir Charles!" replied Mr. Runnington, nevertheless somewhat seriously; but thinking of Lord De la Zouch, he added rather briskly—"if you only intimate an opinion favourable towards venturing the experiment. I'll undertake that *funds* shall be forthcoming."

While Mr. Runnington was saying this, Sir Charles Wolstenholme sat leaning back in his chair, his head inclined on one side, the fingers of one hand playing mechanically with his chin; in fact, he was deeply engaged in thought, and Mr. Runnington did not interrupt him.

"Ah," he presently exclaimed, with a sort of sigh, looking with much vivacity at his companion—"I have it—I have it—I see a way out of the wood! Well, if you can only get ammunition, it's my advice to you to fight the battle over again—but on quite a different field." "Indeed, Sir Charles? What, in a court of equity?" "Oh, pho, no!—You say you *have* entered a *caveat* against the grant of Letters of Administration?" "Yes, certainly," replied Mr. Runnington, a little disappointed; "but, as I explained, there's no chance of establishing a *will*." "Never mind *that*! Throw the will to the dogs. I'll show you a wrinkle worth a hundred wills! When you're called on to support your *caveat*, do so on the ground that Mr. Aubrey is nearer of kin to Lady Stratton than this fellow Titmouse—that will make it necessary for Titmouse, you know, to set forth his pedigree with the greatest minuteness; you will have a Commission to go down to the spot where all the witnesses are, and those fellows, the proctors, you know, are as keen as beagles——" "Oh, Sir Charles, Sir Charles! I—I see it all! Oh, admirable——" "To be sure!" continued Sir Charles, with much animation, "Their case will be as it were laid

on the rack, when the process of the ecclesiastical court is applied to it. You have an examiner on the spot—all secret and mysterious—proctors ferreting out all sorts of all old registers and musty documents, that *we* should never think of. 'Tis quite in their line—births, deaths, and marriages, and everything connected with them. By Jove! *if* there's a flaw, you'll hit it in *this* way!"

"Oh, heavens!" cried Mr. Runnington, with grateful glee, "your hint is worth thousands upon thousands of pounds——"

"If it only produces *Ten Thousand a-Year*—ah, hah!" interrupted Sir Charles, laughing good-naturedly; and very soon afterwards Mr. Runnington quitted his chamber, charmed and excited by the masterly suggestion which had been made to him, and resolved to go off to his proctor, and see about acting upon it forthwith, and get a kind of general notion of the process which he thought of commencing. You might, within an hour's time, have seen Mr. Runnington closeted with his proctor—the proctor always employed by his firm—Mr. Obadiah Pounce—a man whose look told you he was made for penetrating into and poking about in anything musty, or obscure. He was, indeed, thoroughly up to his business—not an abler or more experienced proctor was to be found in Doctor's Commons. As Mr. Pounce was not entirely unacquainted with the facts—inasmuch as he had drawn up the case which had been submitted to Dr. Flare for his opinion as to the admissibility of Mr. Parkinson's draft of Lady Stratton's intended will to probate—it did not take long to put him in possession of the wishes and intentions of Mr. Runnington.

"Let us come away to Dr. Flare at once," quoth Pounce, putting his watch into his fob—"You'll catch him in just now, I know, and perhaps in good-humour; and a short consultation with *him* will be worth half-a-dozen written opinions."

So they set off for the chambers of Dr. Flare, which were at only a few yards' distance. Dr. Flare was a very great man in the ecclesiastical court; in fact, by far the most eminent practitioner there. He was thoroughly versed in ecclesiastical law, and every species of learning connected with it; in fact, he had for the last thirty years been concerned in every case of the least importance which had come before that solemn, quaint, and mysterious tribunal. He was possessed of great acuteness and powers of arrangement, of wonderful industry; but his capital quality was that of thoroughly identifying himself with his cause. Into every case in which he was employed, he entered with all the keenness and vivacity which he could have displayed in one of vital personal consequence to himself. But, to be sure, such a *temper* was his! So fierce and fiery, that it scorched everybody that came into contact with him. In spite of considerable impetuosity of temper, he was a kind, an honourable, and high-minded man; and when not in actual conflict, lived on very good terms with the solemn, sleepy, old gentlemen, to whom he was sometimes opposed. In person, he was short and spare; his slight grey whiskers looked as if they had been *calcined* by his cheeks, which, though thin, were of a florid red colour; his forehead was ample: and there was an expression about his piercing grey eyes which seemed to ask, with a curse, of any one entering, "why d'ye interrupt me?" When Mr. Pounce and Mr. Runnington entered his room—which was covered with papers and open books—the Doctor was settling, *in furore*, Articles extending over many hundred folios, against an unhappy curate, flourishing on forty pounds a-year in Rutlandshire, "*touching and concerning his soul's health, and the lawful correction and reformation of his manners and excesses*" (such was the solemn and affectionate strain in which the reverend delinquent was addressed), for having refused to baptize a child by the name of "*Judas Iscariot*"—that being the name described to be given to his infant by a blasphemous little Radical cobbler, a chattering infidel, who sought, by that means, to evince his insane hatred of the Christian religion. Now, Dr.

Flare was himself an ardent friend of the church, and a sincere Christian : but by virtue of the quality I have before alluded to, he had brought himself to look upon this poor clergyman as guilty of a most flagrant piece of wickedness ; and was forging, *con amore*, the bolt to be presently levelled at so enormous an offender. But a few minutes before their arrival, moreover, an incident had occurred to the Doctor which had roused him into a kind of frenzy : he had been interrupted by an applicant to be sworn to some matter or other, for which the Doctor was entitled to the usual fee of one shilling. The deponent had only half-a-crown ; so the Doctor had to take out his purse, and give him the difference (eighteenpence), with a muttered curse : and you may guess the scene that ensued on the deponent's presently returning, and requesting that the sixpence which the Doctor had given him might be changed, being a *bad one* ! —Mr. Runnington was prepared to go fully into his case before Doctor Flare ; but on catching sight of him, he looked so startling a contrast to the calm and affable Sir Charles Wolstenholme—so like a hyena squatting in his den—that his heart suddenly failed him ; and after observing, that instead of interrupting the Doctor at that time, he would immediately lay a written case before him, he and Mr. Pounce made their escape into the open air ; the former looking so relieved of apprehension, that Mr. Pounce almost died with laughter. But it occurred to Mr. Runnington, that in the present stage of the business, Mr. Pounce was just as satisfactory an adviser as Dr. Flare could be—and he determined upon being guided by Mr. Pounce, whom he immediately instructed to retain Dr. Flare ; and then talked over the whole case, in all its bearings—the result being, that Mr. Pounce entirely corroborated the view taken by Sir Charles Wolstenholme, and pointed out so clearly and forcibly the peculiar advantages attending the contemplated mode of procedure, that Mr. Runnington nearly made up his mind on the spot, to venture on the experiment ; but, at all events, undertook to give his final decision within twenty-four hours' time. The next morning, however, he received information from Mr. Pounce, which was calculated to quicken his motions ; viz., that Mr. Titmouse was moving, and had just "*warned the caveat*," with a view to discovering who his opponent was, and what was the ground of his opposition. Now, this chanced to occur on the very day of Lord De la Zouch's arrival in London ; his servant calling at Mr. Runnington's office with a note requesting his attendance in Dover Street, within a few hours of Mr. Runnington's receiving intelligence of the movements of Mr. Titmouse. The result of a very long and animated discussion between Mr. Runnington and Lord De la Zouch was, that his lordship acquiesced in the expediency of the course suggested to him, namely, to suspend for a month or two carrying into effect the scheme which he had formed for extricating Mr. Aubrey from all his liabilities—since the proceedings about to be instituted in the ecclesiastical court might possibly render unnecessary the very large pecuniary sacrifice, by disentitling Mr. Titmouse to receive any part of the demand he was at present enforcing against Mr. Aubrey. His lordship then gave a *carte blanche* to Mr. Runnington, and authorized him to commence, and vigorously prosecute every proceeding that might be necessary—to give and take no quarter ; for Lord De la Zouch expressed the warmest indignation at the whole conduct of Mr. Gammon—particularly his advances towards Miss Aubrey, and the audacious measures he had resorted to for the purpose of securing her favour. His lordship also felt, in common with Sir Charles Wolstenholme, and Mr. Runnington, that Mr. Gammon's avowal to Miss Aubrey of his absolute control over the enjoyment of the Yatton property, warranted the suspicion that the vigorous proceedings about to be instituted would lead to important results.

Thus fortified, Mr. Runnington immediately gave instructions to Mr. Pounce to proceed ; and that person at once entered formally into battle with his

brother proctor Mr. Quod, who was acting for Mr. Titmouse. Supposing it to be all a very simple straightforward affair on the part of Mr. Titmouse, Mr. Quod did not give himself any particular concern about the step taken by Mr. Pounce, and with which he did not acquaint Mr. Gammon, till that gentleman called to inquire in what state the proceedings were; and when he found the ground taken by Mr. Aubrey, and that it would compel Mr. Titmouse to prove over again every link in the chain which connected him with the elder branch of the Aubrey family, he was not a little agitated, though he made a great effort to conceal it, while listening to Mr. Quod's account of the process about to be commenced. Each party, it seemed, would have to give in to the court "*an allegation*," or statement of the pedigree he intended to establish, and which would be lodged at the registry. Each would then, in due course, obtain a copy of his opponent's allegation, in order to guide him in framing his own proof and interrogations. A commission would then be sent by the court into the county where the witnesses resided, to examine them—the examiner being an officer of the court, a proctor—and representing the court in the proceeding. This officer having been furnished by the parties with a copy of the two allegations, the names of the witnesses, and the interrogatories, would proceed to examine the witnesses; but in a manner very different from any adopted by the courts of law—viz., one by one, alone, secretly, and in the most searching and thorough manner; and having given his or her evidence, the witness would be formally threatened with the terrors of the ecclesiastical court, if he or she should presume to disclose to any person, much less the parties, the evidence that had been extracted by the examiner. When the whole of the evidence had been in this mysterious way collected, it would be lodged in the proper office of the court; and till the arrival of the proper time for "*publication passing*," i.e., permitting both parties to take copies of the evidence—they would be in total ignorance as to the exact nature of the evidence which had been given by even their own witnesses. Mr. Quod added, that the briefs which had been used at the trial of the action of ejectment, would of themselves furnish almost the entire "*allegations*," and greatly facilitate and accelerate the proceedings.

"Then, do the parties, or their proctors, go down beforehand to the spot where the commission is to be held?"

"Oh yes, both parties, of course—Pounce and I shall be both at work down there, rummaging registries, records, churchyards—brushing up every man, woman, and child, that's got a word to say on the subject—warm work, warm work, Mr. Gammon! We sha'n't leave a stone unturned on either side! Lord, I recollect a case, for instance, where a *marriage* passed muster in all your common-law courts, one after the other; but as soon as it got into *our* hands—ah, ha!—we found out that it was no marriage at all! and some thirty or forty thousand a-year changed hands! What d'ye think of that?" said Mr. Quod, rubbing his hands, with a pleased and confident air, that strangely contrasted with the reserved and disconcerted manner of his companion, who, in fact, had been thrown into a cold perspiration by what he had heard.

"Pounce," continued Quod, "is a keen hand, but I know one that's not afraid of him any day! But I'm sorry they've secured Dr. Flare, I own——"

"Ah, well, that can't be helped now, you know. Good-day, Mr. Quod," said Gammon with a sickly smile; "I shall be with you about this time to-morrow, to make arrangements." And with this he withdrew.

"Curse Lady Stratton—her will—her policy—everything connected with the old creature," said Gammon to himself vehemently, as he sat that evening alone, in his chamber, meditating upon this most unexpected turn which the thing had taken; "nothing but vexation, and disappointment, and *danger*, by Heaven!—attends every move I make in her accursed affairs! Was there

ever such a twist, for instance, as this? Who could have dreamed of it? What may it not lead to?" Here he got up hastily, and walked for some minutes to and fro. "By Heavens, it won't do! We must give it up without a contest. Yet that's throwing away a clear twenty thousand pounds, too! And Titmouse will be kicking, too, at that! But I'll quickly silence *him*!" Another pause. "Stay—stay—that won't do either! Oh, murder, no!—not for a moment! What will they not conclude from our sudden striking? Of course, that our case is rotten—that we dare not bring Titmouse's pedigree again into the light; and, besides, by relinquishing to them so large a sum, shall we not be putting weapons into their hands against ourselves? Ay, to be sure! So, by —, here we are in for it whether we will or not—and no escape!" The latter words he uttered aloud, at the same time snapping his fingers with a desperate air; and then, throwing himself down upon the sofa, he continued for a long time in a state of most direful perplexity and alarm. Then another thought occurred to him. "Suppose that one were to sound Aubrey or Runnington on the subject, and tell them that I have prevailed on Titmouse to withdraw his claim to administer—in consideration of the moral certainty there is that Lady Stratton intended *they* should have her property—Bah! *that* won't do! They'd never believe us! But who the deuce is finding the funds for such a serious contest as this? Runnington has no doubt got some of Aubrey's friends to come forward and make a last experiment on his behalf. But why take this particular move?" He drew a long breath, and every particle of colour fled from his cheek. "Alas! alas! I now see it all. Miss Aubrey has betrayed me! She has told to her brother—to Runnington—what, in my madness, I mentioned to her! That explains all! Yes, you beautiful fiend, it is your hand that has commenced the work of destruction—as you suppose!"

Neither Lord De la Zouch nor Mr. Runnington saw any necessity for hesitating to apprise Mr. Aubrey of the steps they meditated taking on his behalf, as soon as they had come to the determination above recited, and which, of course, it became necessary that he should distinctly sanction. During the course, therefore, of the day after that on which their determination had been taken, at Lord De la Zouch's desire, Mr. Runnington undertook to make the important communication to Mr. Aubrey. For a while he seemed to stagger under the weight of intelligence of such magnitude; and it was some time before he recovered calmness of feeling sufficient to appreciate the nature and consequences of the meditated step—viz., a direct and immediate attempt to replace him in the possession of the estates from which he had been some two years before displaced. But all other considerations were speedily absorbed in one which most profoundly affected him—the princely conduct of his friend Lord De la Zouch. Mr. Aubrey said scarce anything upon this topic for some time; but Mr. Runnington perceived how powerfully his feelings were excited. And will it occasion surprise when I say that this feeling of gratitude towards the creature—towards the noble instrument—was presently itself merged into another, that of gratitude towards God, whose beneficent purpose concerning him he contemplated with a holy awe? Mr. Runnington was greatly moved by the spectacle before him; but desirous of relieving the excitement under which he perceived Mr. Aubrey labouring, he turned the conversation towards the practical details, and apprized him of the consultation he had had with Sir Charles Wolstenholme, to all of which Mr. Aubrey listened with intense interest, and thoroughly appreciated the value of the admirable suggestion upon which they were acting. But Lord De la Zouch had, with a most delicate consideration, peremptorily enjoined Mr. Runnington not to acquaint Mr. Aubrey with the circumstance, either of his lordship's having come over from France solely on his affairs, or of his meditated project of summarily releasing Mr. Aubrey

from all his embarrassments. As soon as Mr. Runnington had informed Mr. Aubrey that he would find his lordship then at Dover Street, and in readiness to receive him, that closed their interview; and Mr. Aubrey, in a state of extraordinary exhilaration of spirits, instantly set off to see his benefactor. After a long interview, Lord De la Zouch insisted on setting out for Vivian Street, for he declared he could not let another hour pass without seeing those in whose welfare he felt so tender an interest: so arm in arm they walked towards Vivian Street; and it would have made any one's heart thrill with satisfaction to see the brightened countenance of poor Aubrey, as he walked along, full of joyful excitement. It seemed as though a millstone had been taken from his neck; for though he was, indeed, of a somewhat sanguine temperament, yet had he not, in what had happened, solid ground to sustain the strongest and brightest hopes? Whether he was right, or whether he was wrong, still he entertained a confidence that it was God's good providence to which he was indebted for what had happened—and that He would bring it to a successful issue. They agreed together, as they neared Vivian Street, to be guided by circumstances, in communicating or withholding information of the glorious interference in their favour which was at that moment in active operation. Mr. Aubrey's knock—so vastly sharper and more energetic than was his wont—brought two fair faces to the window in a trice; and faces pale with apprehension; but who shall tell the agitation they experienced on seeing Lord De la Zouch and Mr. Aubrey? 'Twas an affecting interview; here was their princely deliverer—for as such, indeed, they regarded him, though as yet ignorant of his last noble act of munificence! His lordship's quick and affectionate eye detected, with much pain, the ravages of the cankering anxiety which had been so long their lot; how much thinner were both of them, and was more especially Mr. Aubrey, than when he had last seen them! And the mourning which they wore for Lady Stratton made the delicate figures of Mrs. Aubrey and Kate appear slighter than even they really were. Their countenances, also, bore the traces of sorrow and suffering—but the *expression* was, if possible, lovelier than ever. The fire and spirit of Kate's blue eyes was subdued into an exquisite expression of serenity and pensiveness; but on the present occasion her bosom was agitated by so many conflicting feelings—she felt conscious that her very sense of embarrassment was a delicious one—as gave a surprising vivacity of expression to her features. Lord De la Zouch's heart melted within him, as he looked at them, and reflected on the sufferings through which they had passed, and felt a delighted consciousness of the pleasure which his appearance occasioned that virtuous but long oppressed and harassed family; and in the scene of their graceful and honourable poverty: and devout and earnest were his wish and his hope, that Providence would be pleased to crown with success his interference in their behalf. His lordship would not be denied on one matter, upon which he declared that he had made up his mind—that they should all of them return with him to dinner in Dover Street;—and, to be sure, the sight of his carriage, which he had ordered to follow him within an hour's time, gave them to understand that he really was in earnest—and they both hastened up to dress, oh, with what bounding hearts, and elastic steps!—Lord De la Zouch felt, as they all sat together in his carriage, as though he were a fond father restored to the presence of long afflicted children; and his courtesy was touched with an exquisite tenderness. When they entered the spacious and lofty drawing-rooms, which, though then wearing the deserted appearance incident to the season, reminded them of many former hours of splendid enjoyment, they felt a flutter of spirits, which it required a little effort to overcome. The drawing-room and the dining-room struck them as quite prodigious, from their contrast to the little rooms to which they had been so long accustomed in Vivian Street: and several other little

incidents revived recollections of a painfully interesting nature ; but as their spirits grew more exhilarated, they felt a sense of real enjoyment to which all of them had long been strangers. One or two sly allusions made by his lordship to the probable future occupants of the house, and the more modern air they might choose, perhaps, to give it, brought as bright a bloom into Miss Aubrey's fair cheek, as ever had mantled there ! When they had returned home, it was impossible to think of *bed*—all of them had so much to say, and were in so joyous an excitement ; and before they had parted for the night, Aubrey, unable any longer to keep to himself the true source of his enjoyment, electrified them by a frank and full disclosure of the great event of the day !

A day or two afterwards, Lord De la Zouch returned to the Continent, having pledged Mr. Aubrey to communicate with him frequently, and particularly with reference to the progress of the proceedings. The splendid chance which now existed of retrieving his former position, was not allowed by Mr. Aubrey to interfere with his close attention to his professional studies, to which he might yet have to look for the only source of his future subsistence ; and he continued his attendance at Mr. Mansfield's chambers with exemplary punctuality and energy.

It was not long after Lord De la Zouch's return to the Continent, that the melancholy events occurred which have just been narrated—I mean the serious illness of Lord Dreddlington, and the untimely death of Lady Cecilia. The Aubreys had no other intimation of those events but such as they derived from the public papers—from which it appeared that his lordship's illness had occasioned the fright which had ended in so sad a catastrophe with Lady Cecilia ; and that his lordship's illness had originated in agitation and distress, occasioned by the failure of extensive mercantile speculations into which he had allowed himself to be betrayed by designing persons. In passing down Park Lane, Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey, and Kate, saw a hatchment suspended from the house of Mr. Titmouse ; and, some short time afterwards, they saw that gentleman himself, in the park, driving a beautiful dark-blue cab, his tiger and he both in mourning—which became them equally. Black greatly changes most people's appearance ; but it effected a peculiar change in Mr. Titmouse ; the fact being, however, that, desirous of exhibiting even extra marks of respect for the memory of the dear deceased Lady Cecilia, he had put his sandy moustaches and imperial into mourning, by carefully dressing them with Indian ink, which gave a very touching and pensive character indeed to his features !

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHILE Mr. Pounce and Mr. Quod, after their own fashion, are doing decisive battle with each other, as it were, in a remote corner of the field of action ; while—to change the figure—Mr. Titmouse's pedigree is being subjected to the silent and mysterious inquisition of the ecclesiastical court, let us turn for a moment to contemplate a pitiable figure, a victim of the infernal machinations of Mr. Gammon—I mean the poor old Earl of Dreddlington. He was yet—a month after the death of his unhappy daughter, Lady Cecilia—staggering under the awful shock which he had experienced. Before he had been in any degree restored to consciousness, she had been buried for nearly three weeks ; and the earliest notification to him of the melancholy occurrence, was the deep mourning habiliments of Miss Macspleuchan, who scarcely ever quitted his bedside. When, in a feeble and tremulous voice, he inquired as to the cause of her death,

he could get no other account of it—either from Miss Macspleuchan, his physicians, or the Duke of Tantallan—than that it had been occasioned by the shock of suddenly seeing his lordship brought home seriously ill, she being, moreover, in a very critical state of health. When, at length, he pressed Miss Macspleuchan, upon the matter, and challenged her as to the real cause of what had happened—viz., the blighting discovery of Mr. Titmouse's illegitimacy—she resolutely maintained that he was labouring under a delusion—indeed a double delusion; first, as to his imaginary conversation with Mr. Gammon; and secondly, as to his supposed communication of it to Lady Cecilia. Her heart was smitten, however, by the steadfast look of mournful incredulity with which the Earl regarded her; and, when alone, she reproached herself in tears with the fraud she was practising upon the broken-hearted old man. The Duke, however, seconded by the physician, was peremptory on the point, believing that otherwise the Earl's recovery was impossible; and as his grace invariably joined Miss Macspleuchan in scouting the mere mention of the matter as but the figment of a disordered brain the Earl was at length silenced if not convinced. He peremptorily prohibited Mr. Titmouse, however, from entering his house—much more from appearing in his presence: and there was little difficulty in making that gentleman *appear* satisfied that the sole cause of his exclusion was his cruelty and profligacy towards the late Lady Cecilia:—whereas, with a sickening inward shudder, he was apprized of the real reason by Mr. Gammon. Very shortly after the Earl's illness, the Duke of Tantallan had sent for Mr. Titmouse to interrogate him upon the subject of his lordship's representations; but Mr. Gammon had been beforehand with the Duke, and thoroughly tutored Titmouse—dull and weak though he was—in the part he was to play, and which Mr. Gammon made as easy to him as possible. He started with well-feigned astonishment, indignation, and disgust, as soon as the Duke had mentioned the matter, and said very little—(such were Gammon's peremptory injunctions)—and that little only in expression of amazement—that any one could attach the slightest importance to the mere wanderings of a disordered brain. 'Twas certainly a ticklish matter, the Duke felt, to press too far, or to think of entrusting it to third parties. His grace very naturally concluded, that what his own superior tact and acuteness had failed in eliciting, could be detected by no one else. He frequently pressed Mr. Gammon, however, upon the subject; but that gentleman maintained the same calm front he had exhibited when first challenged upon the subject; giving the same account of all he knew of Titmouse's pedigree—and clenching the matter by sending to his grace a copy of the brief, and of the shorthand writer's notes of the trial—challenging, at the same time, the most rigorous investigation into the matter. It was very natural for the Duke to yield at length, and feel satisfied that the whole affair rested on no other basis than the distempered brain of his suffering kinsman. Nothing shook him more, however, than the sight of Titmouse: for he looked, verily, one whom it was exceedingly difficult to suppose possessed of one drop of aristocratic blood!—Miss Macspleuchan, a woman of superior acuteness, was infinitely more difficult to satisfy upon the subject than the Duke; and though she *said* little, her manner showed that she was satisfied of the existence of some mystery or other, connected with Mr. Titmouse of which Mr. Gammon was master—and the premature discovery of which had produced the deplorable effect upon the Earl under which he was suffering. The Earl, when alone with her, and unconscious of her presence, talked to himself constantly in the same strain; and when conversing with her, in his intervals of consciousness, repeated over and over again, without the slightest variation, facts which seemed as it were to have been burnt in upon his brain. Miss Macspleuchan had—to conceal nothing from the reader—begun to cherish very warm feelings of personal attachment to Mr. Gammon; whose

striking person, fascinating conversation, and flattering attention to herself—a thing quite unusual on the part of any of the Earl's visitors—were well calculated to conduce to such a result. But from the moment of Lord Dreddlington's having made the statement which had been attended by such dreadful consequences, her feelings towards Mr. Gammon had been completely chilled and alienated. Her demeanour, on the few occasions of their meeting, was constrained and distant; her countenance clouded with suspicion, her manners frozen with reserve and hauteur.

Mr. Gammon's first interview with the Earl, after his illness and bereavement, had become a matter of absolute necessity—and was at his lordship's instance; his wishes being conveyed through the Duke of Tantallan, who had intimated to him that it was indeed indispensable, if only to settle some matters of business, of pressing exigency, connected with the failure of the Artificial Rain Company. The Duke was with his noble kinsman at the time of Mr. Gammon's calling—having intended to be present at the interview. They awaited his arrival in the Earl's library. It is very difficult to describe the feelings with which Mr. Gammon prepared for the interview with the man on whom he had inflicted such frightful evil, towards whom he felt that he had acted the part of a fiend. How had he dealt with the absolute confidence which the Earl had reposed in him! The main prop and pillar of the Earl's existence—family pride—he, Gammon, had snapped asunder beneath him; and as for fortune—Gammon knew that the Earl was absolutely ruined. Not, however, that Gammon really felt any commiseration for his victim: his anxiety was only as to how he should extricate himself from liability in respect of it. And had he not cause for shuddering in approaching the Earl on that occasion to be interrogated concerning Titmouse—to look the Earl in the face and deny what had passed between them;—and that, too, when the rigid investigation was pending which might within a few short weeks convict and expose him to the scorn—the indignation—of society, as a monster of fraud and falsehood?

The Earl sat in his library, dressed in deep black, which hung upon his shrunk attenuated figure, as upon an old skeleton. He looked twenty years older than he had appeared two short months before. His hair, white as snow, his pallid emaciated cheek, his weak and wandering eye, and a slight tremulous motion about his head and shoulders—all showed the mere wreck of a man that he had become, and would have shocked and subdued the feelings of any beholder. What a contrast he represented to the portly and commanding figure of the Duke of Tantallan, who sat beside him, with a brow clouded by anxiety and apprehension! At length—"Mr. Gammon, my lord," said the servant in a low tone, after gently opening the door.

"Show him in," said the Duke, rather nervously, adding to the Earl in a hurried whisper,—"now be calm—my dear Dreddlington—be calm—it will be over in a few minutes' time."—The Earl's lips quivered a little, his thin white hands trembled, and his eyes were directed towards the door with a look of apprehension, as the fiend entered. Mr. Gammon was pale, and evidently nervous and excited; his habitual self-command, however, would have concealed it from any but a practised observer. What a glance was that with which he first saw the Earl!—"It gives me deep concern, my lord," said he in a low tone, slowly advancing with an air of profound deference and sympathy, "to see that you have been so great a sufferer!"

"Will you take a chair, sir?" said the Duke, pointing to one which the servant had brought for him, and in which Gammon sat down, with a courteous inclination towards the Duke; and observing that Lord Dreddlington's face had become suddenly flushed, while his lips moved as if he were speaking. "You see," said his grace, "that my lord Dreddlington is but slowly recovering!"—Gammon sighed, and gazed at the Earl with an expression of infinite concern.

"Is it true, sir?" inquired the Earl, after a moment's interval of silence—evidently with a desperate effort. Gammon felt both of his companions eyeing him intently, as he answered calmly—"Alas! your lordship of course alludes to that unhappy Company——" "*Is it true sir?*" repeated the Earl, altogether disregarding Gammon's attempt at evasion.

"You cannot but be aware, Mr. Gammon, of the subject to which my Lord Dreddlington is alluding"—said the Duke in a low tone.

"Oh!" exclaimed Gammon with a slight shrug of his shoulders and a sigh—"I understand that your lordship is alluding to some conversation which you suppose has passed between us concerning Mr. Titmouse." "Sir—sir—yes! yes!"—gasped the Earl, gazing at him intently. "Well, my lord, I have heard that you suppose I told your lordship that he was *illegitimate*." "Ay," said the Earl with tremulous eagerness. "Oh, my lord, you are really labouring under as complete a delusion as ever"—commenced Gammon with a melancholy smile.

"Sir—Mr. Gammon—do you believe that there is *no God*?—that *He* does not know the—the"—interrupted the Earl, but ceased, apparently overpowered by his emotions. Gammon looked in appealing silence at the Duke.

"What makes you imagine, sir, that I am bereft of reason and memory?" presently inquired the Earl, with a strength of voice and manner which alarmed Gammon. "I cannot account, my lord, for the extraordinary hallucination which seems——" "And I suppose, sir, I am also in a delusion concerning the rent-charge for two thousand a-year, which you have got on the Yatton pro——" "Oh, pardon—pardon me, my lord! All pure—absolute, delusion!" interrupted Gammon, with a confident smile, a look and a tone of voice, that would have staggered the most incredulous.

The Earl raised his thin, white, trembling hand, and pressed it against his forehead for a moment; and then said, turning to the Duke—"He would deny that he is now in our presence!" "My dear Dreddlington—don't, for God's sake, excite yourself," said the Duke anxiously; adding, after a pause, "I am as persuaded, as I am of my existence, that you're under a complete delusion! Recollect your serious illness—every one is subject to delusions of some sort or other when he's been so ill as you have?"

"Oh, Tantallan! Tantallan!"—replied the Earl, mournfully shaking his head—"I take God to witness how this man is lying!" The Duke glanced hastily at Gammon as these words were uttered, and observing that he had gone suddenly pale, and was in the act of rising from his chair,

"Pray, Mr. Gammon"—commenced the Duke imploringly. "I can make very great allowance, I assure your grace, for his lordship's situation—but there are bounds which I will allow no man living to overstep with impunity," said Gammon, calmly but resolutely—overjoyed at obtaining such a pretext for abruptly terminating the embarrassing interview—"and unless his lordship chooses instantly to retract what he has said, and apologize for it, I will never enter his presence again!"

"Oh—he had better go!" said the Earl feebly, addressing the Duke, evidently averting his face from Gammon with disgust and horror.

"Mr. Gammon, *pray* resume your seat," said the Duke significantly—"I will undertake to warrant you in regarding the words as not having been spoken."

"I thank your grace," replied Gammon determinedly—"I require an explicit retraction. I entertain a deep deference towards your grace, but am also aware of what is due to myself. My lord," he added, as if at a sudden impulse, addressing the Earl, "do permit me to request your lordship to withdraw and apologize for——" But the Earl turned his face aside, and extending his hand towards Gammon, feebly motioned him away; on which, with a low

bow to the Duke of Tantallan, Gammon took his hat and moved towards the door.

"Sir—Mr. Gammon—you *must* not go," said the Duke earnestly—"you are here on business of pressing importance—all *this* must pass away and be forgotten." "Your grace, I shall be most happy to attend at any time, and anywhere; but this room I quit instantly." "Then, sir, have the goodness to walk into the next room," said the Duke somewhat imperiously, "and I will come to you presently." Mr. Gammon bowed and withdrew.

"Oh God! how atrocious is the conduct of that man!" said the Earl, when they were left alone. "Really, Dreddlington, you must get rid of these—these—absurd notions." "Let me never see his face again!" replied the Earl feebly. "I have but a short time to live, and that time the sight of *him*, I feel, makes still shorter!" The Duke looked both vexed and embarrassed.

"Come, come—now he's here, and on a very important errand—let us have done with him—let us have him back, and I'll tell him you withdraw—" "Withdraw? He *is* withdrawn," said the Earl confusedly. "What d'ye mean, my dear Dreddlington? I say—let me tell him—" "I mean it, was at his chambers, in Holborn—I pledge my honour, I recollect as if it were yester—" "Pho, pho!" cried the Duke, rather impatiently—"it must be done! He's come on matters of the very last importance—the thing's been put off to the very latest moment on your account—that cursed Company!" The Earl looked up at his companion, and a faint smile flitted over his wasted features.

"Ah—I'm now satisfied," said he, shaking his head—"that they must dig a very great depth, indeed, before they come to the copper." The Duke looked puzzled, but said, hastily, "That's right!—I'll have him back, and you'll allow me to say it's all a mistake?" "Certainly—I am satisfied of it." "That will do, my dear Dreddlington!—That's the way such nonsense should be put an end to," said the Duke, and, ringing the bell, ordered the servant to request Mr. Gammon to return. After a brief interval, that gentleman re-entered the library, but with some sternness and reluctance of manner.

"Mr. Gammon," replied the Duke, a little quickly, "my Lord Dreddlington owns he was mistaken—he, of course, withdraws the expression—so we had better at once to business—"

"Ay—certainly! certainly! Have you the papers with you, Mr. Gammon?" inquired the Earl, while his trembling fingers held his gold spectacles. Mr. Gammon bowed rather haughtily, and, resuming the chair he had quitted, drew it to the table, and opened a little packet of papers.

"It was a ridiculous affair, I am afraid, sir," said the Earl, addressing Mr. Gammon, who felt a little surprised at the altered looks and tone of the Earl. "I fear it was extremely *unfortunate*, my lord, in its issue," he replied gravely, arranging his papers.

"The thing did not look so absurd *at first*, Tantallan, I assure you!" said the Earl, addressing the Duke, who was eyeing Mr. Gammon's movements with much anxiety; for he had come prepared to state the final result of long negotiations between the creditors and the directors and shareholders of the Artificial Rain Company. "These things never do—at first," his grace replied, with a sort of sigh.

"Just show us, Mr. Gammon, if you please, the diagrams and the sections of the strata—" "The *what*?" inquired the Duke, turning surprisedly to the Earl—so did Mr. Gammon, and for a moment ceased arranging his papers. Both the Duke and he turned pale, and gazed in silent dismay at their companion. Gammon felt momentarily sick at heart. It was evident that Lord Dreddlington's mind had gently given way. There was a smile of indescribable weakness flickering about the mouth; the eyes were unsteady;

all sternness had vanished from his brow ; and his manner was calm, with even an approach towards cheerfulness. Gammon glanced with horror at the Duke, who, without removing his eyes from Lord Dreddlington, unconsciously exclaimed, " Oh my God ! "

" It is your lordship's pleasure "—faltered Gammon, his hands trembling visibly.

" You are right, Tantallan," said Lord Dreddlington, as if suddenly struck by the peculiar look with which the Duke continued to regard him. " You shall hear all ; but we must be alone. Sir, you may retire, and be in attendance another day," with all his former stateliness of manner, but with a feeble voice. Mr. Gammon, very greatly agitated, hastily put together the documents he had partially arranged on the table, and with a profound bow withdrew.

" At nine this evening—in Portman Square, sir, if you please," said the Duke in an agitated manner.

" I will attend your grace," said Gammon, and not with a little trepidation closed the door after him ; on which the Earl proceeded, in a very anxious manner, to intimate the existence of a conspiracy on the part of the Earl of Fitzclaret and others, to prevent his—Lord Dreddlington's—obtaining a marquisate, on the ground that he had been connected with Sir Sharper Bubble in a swindling company ; and his lordship had good grounds for believing that Mr. Gammon was secretly lending his assistance to the undertaking, and his coming there that morning with the papers relating to the intended purchase of the Isle of Dogs, was in furtherance of his treacherous objects ! The Duke listened in silent dismay to this rambling account of the imaginary conspiracy, and had just determined upon quietly sending for Miss Macspleuchan, when the Earl abruptly paused, and after a confused stare at his companion, pressed his hand to his forehead, and said with hesitation and embarrassment—" Pray, Tantallan, don't think anything more about what I have been saying ! I—I—feel that I have been talking nonsense—incoherently.—Surely it must have struck *you so* ? Eh, Tantallan ? "

There was something so imbecile and miserable in the look with which the Earl regarded his companion, that the Duke for a moment could not reply to him. At length, " My dear Dreddlington," said he, gently grasping his hand, " you are at present, only a little excited—you will soon recover yourself. Let us ask Miss Macspleuchan to join us, as she is sitting all alone up-stairs."

" Not just now, Tantallan—I feel I have wandered a little, but all is now right again. He is gone, is he ? " The Duke nodded. " The sight of that man was at first too much for me ; I felt oppressed and confused, but I thought it right to struggle against it !—He denied it all ?—Is not that enough to drive a man out of his senses ? " " My dear Dreddlington, we shall get wrong again—let us quit the subject," said the Duke anxiously. " No," replied the Earl languidly, " do not fear me ; I feel quite myself again ! I can only repeat to you, that that man's conversation with me about—about"—he shuddered—" as certainly happened, as the heavens are above us ! "

The Earl had really, at all events for the present, recovered from the temporary confusion into which his thoughts had fallen ; and proceeded, with as much energy as his shattered condition would admit of, to give the Duke, as he had often done before, a distinct and consistent account of all that had taken place at Mr. Gammon's chambers :—and, as he went on, it all of a sudden occurred to his grace, for the first time—how improbable it is that Lord Dreddlington should have *invented* a scene, which he has uniformly described in almost the same words ? What but truth and reality could enable him to preserve such a consistency in a scene described with such a minute circumstantiality ? Having once looked at the matter in this new light, every succeeding moment saw him more and more satisfied that such was the true view

of it ; and before he had quitted his unfortunate kinsman, he had pretty nearly convinced himself of three things ; first, that Mr. Titmouse was a hideous, little, base-born miscreant and impostor ; secondly, that Mr. Gammon must be the profoundest scoundrel living ; and lastly, that it was very singular that he—the Duke—had been so long in arriving at such a conclusion. But then, it subsequently occurred to the sagacious Duke—how was he to act ? What position was he to assume with Mr. Gammon, when he came in the evening, in obedience to his grace's own appointment ? What reasons could he assign for his sudden change of opinion ? Nothing new had occurred : and he felt a little embarrassed, seeing that all he should be able to say, would be that he had at length taken a different view of the facts ! At all events, he determined to put the brief of Mr. Titmouse's case, used at the trials, and which Mr. Gammon had some time before forwarded to his grace's house, into the hands of some eminent lawyer, for a candid and confidential opinion.

Mr. Gammon, on quitting Lord Dreddlington's house, quickly recovered from the momentary shock which he had suffered in the Earl's presence ; and—shall I record the fact ?—all other feelings were merged in one of delight and exultation at the awful calamity which had befallen Lord Dreddlington : no one, Mr. Gammon considered, would thenceforth think of attaching the least importance to anything the Earl might say, or had said, which would doubtless be deemed the mere creation of a disordered brain. Then all that would be necessary would be the silencing Titmouse—no difficult matter, since even he could comprehend that secrecy was to him a matter of salvation or destruction. But then, again, like a criminal's chance glance at the hideous guillotine or gallows in the distance—a recollection of the ecclesiastical inquiry at that instant in vigorous action, blanched the cheek of Mr. Gammon, and dashed all his new hopes to the ground. If those infernal inquisitors *should* discover all, and thereby demonstrate Titmouse's illegitimacy, how perfectly frightful would be the position of Mr. Gammon ? What would then avail him the insanity of Lord Dreddlington ? Would it not, on the contrary, be then attributed to the right cause—the atrocious cruelty and villainy which had been practised upon him ? How irretrievably was Gammon committed by his repeated and solemn asseverations to Miss Macspleuchan and the Earl of Dreddlington ? The evidence which sufficed to entitle Mr. Aubrey to administer to Lady Stratton, would also suffice to entitle him to an immediate restoration to the Yatton property ! And would the matter rest there ? Would no steps be taken, in such an event, to fix him—Gammon—as a partner, or a prime mover, in the fraud and conspiracy by which alone, it would be then alleged, Titmouse had been enabled to recover the property ?

The chief object of Mr. Gammon's interview with the Earl of Dreddlington had been to communicate to his lordship information concerning the position in which he stood with reference to the defunct Artificial Rain Company. The very prominent and active part which his lordship had been seduced into taking, in the patronage and management of that Company, had very reasonably marked him out as the fittest object of attack to the creditors. The Company had no Act of Parliament, nor charter, nor deed of settlement ; it was simply a huge unwieldy *partnership*, consisting of all such persons as could be shown to be interested, or to have held themselves out to the world as interested, in it ; and consequently, whether individually known or not, liable to the public who had dealt with the Company, and given credit to it, on the very obvious principle of equity, that all who would seek to share the profits of the speculation must be responsible for its liabilities. In the present instance, had it not been for the circumstance of there being a considerable number of weak, inexperienced, but responsible adventurers, who, by entering into the speculation, had become liable to share Lord Dreddlington's burden of liability, his lordship

must have been totally ruined to all intents and purposes. As soon as Sir Sharper Bubble's absconding had opened the eyes of the public, and of the shareholders, it became necessary to take instant measures for ascertaining the exact state of affairs—and the liabilities which had been contracted on behalf of the Company. Heavens! what a frightful array of creditors now made their appearance against the Artificial Rain Company! It was inconceivable how so many, and to so immense an amount, could have arisen during the short period of the Company's being in existence; but the fact is, that there are always thousands of persons who, as soon as they once see individuals of undoubted responsibility fairly committed to a company of this sort, will give almost unlimited credit, and supply anything that may be ordered on behalf or for the purposes of the company. This Company had originated in a supposed grand discovery of Doctor Diabolus Gander, that there were certain modes of operating upon the atmosphere, by means of electrical agency, which would ensure an abundant supply of rain in seasons of the greatest drought. Now, first and foremost among the creditors of the Company, was that distinguished philosopher himself; who, to constitute himself effectually a creditor, had declined to take any shares in the concern. He now claimed £1,700 for a series of "preliminary experiments," independently of compensation for his time and services in conducting the aforesaid experiments;—and, in order to put the question of *liability* beyond all doubt, the Doctor had taken care, from time to time, to invite the more distinguished and wealthy of the shareholders to come and witness his experiments—always carefully noting down their names, and the names also of those witnesses who could prove their attendance—the interest they took in the experiments—their observations as to the success of the Company, etc., etc., and their repeated acknowledgments of the uniform courtesy of the worthy Doctor, who thought no pains too great to explain the nature of his surprising operations. Then, again, he had entered into an agreement, signed by Lord Dreddlington, and one or two others on behalf of the Company, by which he was appointed "permanent scientific director" for a period of ten years, at a salary of £1,000 a-year, over and above the sums agreed to be paid him for "collateral and supplementary services." This latter claim, however, the Doctor very generously offered to compromise, in consideration of the exhalation of the Company, on payment of four thousand pounds down. Then came a demand amounting to little short of £25,000 for an inconceivable quantity of copper wire, which had been purchased for the purpose of being used in all the cities and towns which chose to avail themselves of the services of the Company, in the following way—viz., a complete circle of electric communication was to be obtained, by attaching wires to the summits of all the church steeples, and it was necessary that the wires should be of considerable strength and thickness, to prevent their being broken by birds flying against, and perching upon them. (But Dr. Gander declared that he had discovered a mode of charging the wires, which would cause any bird which came into contact with them immediately to fall down dead.) Then there were fearful charges for at least nine miles' length of leaden pipes and hose, and for steam-engines, and electrical machines and so forth; particularly an item of eight thousand pounds for the expenses of trying the experiment in a village in the extremity of Cornwall, and which was very nearly completed, when the unfortunate event occurred which occasioned the sudden break-up of the Company. This will suffice to give the uninitiated reader a glimpse of the real nature of the liabilities incurred by those who had become partners in this splendid undertaking. Dr. Gander got two actions commenced the very day after the departure of Sir Sharper Bubble, against six of the principal shareholders, in respect of his "preliminary experiments" and his agreement for ten years' service: and writs came fluttering in almost daily; all which rendered it

necessary to take measures for coming to an amicable compromise. After very great exertions, and attending many meetings, Mr. Gammon succeeded in provisionally extricating Lord Dreddlinton, on his paying down, within twelve months, the sum of £18,000; the Duke of Tantallan was in for some £8,000, the Marquis of Marmalade for £6,000: and those two peers made the most solemn vows never to have anything to do again with joint-stock companies: though it must be owned that they had been, as the phrase is, "let off easily." But I must not disguise from the reader that the Artificial Rain Company was not the only one with which these distinguished individuals, together with Lord Dreddlinton, had become connected—there was the Gunpowder and Fresh Water Company, of which Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap were the solicitors—but *sufficient for the day is the evil thereof*; and let it suffice, for the present, to say, that some short time afterwards the Duke of Tantallan, on the part of the Earl of Dreddlinton, paid down the sum of £10,000 on account of the above-mentioned sum of £18,000, the remainder of which was to be called for in six months' time. Mr. Gammon, however, could not think of the possibility of the Gunpowder Company's explosion without a shudder, on account of the dreadful extent to which Lord Dreddlinton was implicated, and from which Gammon feared that there really were no means of extricating him. What would he have given never to have seduced the Earl into embarking into any such speculations? Nay, what would he not have given, never to have set eyes upon either the Earl of Dreddlinton or the Lady Cecilia? What advantage had he ever gained, after all, by his desperate grasp after aristocratic connection? If, however, the Earl should prove really and permanently insane, what a Godsend would such an event be, in every point of view, to Gammon—silencing for ever the chief sufferer—and saving Gammon from all the endless vexations and anxieties arising out of personal explanations and collisions with the man whom he had drawn into the vortex of pecuniary ruin.

As for Mr. Titmouse, the *fortunate* (!) possessor of ten thousand a-year—those of the public who had an opportunity of watching his public motions, gave him credit for feeling very deeply the bereavement which he had sustained in the loss of the Lady Cecilia; but those more intimately acquainted with his family circumstances, could not help remarking one little ingredient of pleasure in his recent cup of bitterness; viz., that as Lady Cecilia had left no dear pledge of affection—Mr. Titmouse was not only saved a vast deal of anxiety as to the bringing up of the child, but had become himself heir-apparent to the barony of Drelincourt, on the death of the Earl of Dreddlinton; who, whatever might be the effect of his whispered misfortunes in his pecuniary speculations, had not the power, being merely tenant for life under the entail, of injuring the fortune annexed to the title. Though Mr. Gammon loathed the very sight, the very thought, of Titmouse, he was yet the centre of prodigious anxiety to Gammon, who felt that he had, at all events at present, a deep stake in the upholding to the world Mr. Titmouse's position and credit. He had been frightened by Gammon into a state of the most abject submission to all his requirements—one of which was the preservation of that external decorum, when in public, which had produced the very favourable impression already adverted to. The other was—a vast contraction of his expenditure. Mr. Gammon insisted upon his disposing of his house in Park Lane—which had, indeed, been for three months almost destitute of furniture, that having fallen a prey to divers of his execution-creditors—but engaged for him a suite of handsome furnished apartments in Chapel Street, Mayfair, allowing him the attendance of a valet, as usual; and also hiring for him a cab, tiger, groom, and a couple of saddle-horses, with which Mr. Titmouse contrived to make an appearance, before so much of the world as was left in London during the autumn, suitable to his station. Some of the more clamorous of his creditors,

Mr. Gammon had contrived to pacify by considerable payments on account, and a solemn assurance that every one of Mr. Titmouse's debts was in train for rapid liquidation. Could his creditors, indeed—Gammon asked—fail to see and judge for themselves, what an altered man, in his person and habits, Mr. Titmouse had become, since the shock he had received on the death of Lady Cecilia? Had, indeed, Mr. Titmouse felt ever so disposed to re-enter the scenes of profligacy—in which he had revelled so madly during the first eighteen months after his extraordinary exaltation—there was a serious obstacle to his doing so, in his having neglected to pay divers heavy “debts of honour,” as they are strangely called; for which delinquencies he had twice had his nose pulled in public, and once been horse-whipped. The gates of the sporting world were thus finally closed against him, and so at least one source of profligate expenditure shut out. Though, however, he was free to ride or drive whithersoever he chose—and that, too, as became a man of fashion, in respect of appearance and equipment—he felt but a prisoner at large, and dependent entirely upon the will and pleasure of Mr. Gammon for his very means of subsistence. Most of his evenings were spent in such of the theatres as were open, while his nights were often passed amidst scenes which were very strange ones indeed for a young widower to be seen in! Though he was a frequent visitor at Brookes', I must nevertheless do that respectable club the justice of saying that its members were not very anxious for the presence or company of Mr. Titmouse. In fact, but for the continued countenance afforded him, for reasons best known to that gentleman, by Mr. Gibbet, my friend would have been some time ago unceremoniously expelled from the club, where he had made, certainly, one or two exceedingly disagreeable exhibitions. Liquor was made for fools to get drunk with, and so shorten their encumbering existence upon the earth; and as for Titmouse, I really do not think he ever went to bed completely sober; and he avowed, that “whenever he was alone, he felt so miserable;” and there was only one way, he said, to “drive dull care away.” Though aware of it in point of fact, Titmouse had neither sense nor sensibility enough to appreciate the fearful frailty of that tenure by which he held his present advantages of station—never reflecting that he was liable at any moment to be precipitated down from his elevation, far deeper into obscurity and poverty than he had ever emerged from! He found town, at a dull season—the fall of the year—to be sure, become daily duller, the sphere of his enjoyments having become so miserably contracted. Mr. Gammon was becoming more and more stern and gloomy; in fact, Titmouse always dreaded to go near him, for he enjoined on Titmouse, whenever they met, a circumspection which was new and intolerable. He was refused admission at Lord Dreddlington's; the Duke of Tantallan's he dared not go near. When, in the park, he met the Earl's chariot—a dismal object indeed to him—driving slowly along—all in deep mourning—the place of Lady Cecilia occupied now by Miss Macspleuchan, and the shattered old white-haired man beside her, taking evidently no notice of anything about him; if Titmouse caught Miss Macspleuchan's eye, it was instantly removed, as from a disgusting object. He never met that carriage without a shudder, and a violent one, at thought of the frightful fraud of which he had been at first the unconscious instrument, but to which he was now a consenting party. He had earnestly besought Mr. Gammon to allow him to spend a few months on the Continent, and provide him with funds to do so; but on due consideration, Mr. Gammon refused, in the very critical conjuncture of existing circumstances—at all events till he should have been furnished with some clue to the course which the pending investigation was taking. But Mr. Gammon consented to his going down to Yatton; so down he went, but to encounter only sullen faces; servants whose wages were in arrear; tenants whom his exactions were ruining; the friends of

Mudflint and Bloodsuck indignant at his not coming forward to rescue them from impending destruction : and his constituency furious at the number of bills remaining unpaid ; at his total disregard of their interests in Parliament ; and his contemptible and ridiculous conduct and appearance there, which had made them the laughing-stock of the nation. As for any of the nobility or gentry of the neighbourhood, of course their notice of him was quite out of the question. From good little Dr. Tatham, even, he could get nothing more than a cold and guarded civility ; in fact, Mr. Titmouse was fifty times more miserable at Yatton than he had been in London ; and, moreover, the old Hall had been completely stripped of the handsome furniture that had been put into it on his coming into possession, by his voracious execution-creditors ; and all he could do here to enjoy existence, was to smoke, and drink brandy and water. He felt an impostor ; that he had no right to be there ; no claim to the respect or attention of any one. Through the noble grounds of Yatton, amidst the soft melancholy sunshine of October, he walked, frightened and alone ; a falling leaf alighting on him would make him start with apprehension, and almost drop his cigar.

While such was the dreary aspect of things at Yatton, what was the condition of Mr. Gammon in London ?

It is not possible that any one who betakes himself to tortuous modes of effecting his purposes, and securing the objects which a keen ambition may have proposed to him, can be *happy*. The perpetual dread of detection and failure, causes him to lie, as it were, ever writhing upon a bed of torture. To feel one's-self *failing*, in spite of deeply-laid, desperate, and dishonourable schemes for securing success, is sickening and miserable indeed. Such an one feels that the bitterness of disappointment will not be mitigated or assuaged by a consciousness of the sympathy and respect of those who have witnessed the unsuccessful attempts—a thought which is deadening to the soul ; and Gammon felt himself among the most miserable of mankind. All other anxieties were, however, absorbed in one—that concerning the issue of the inquiry then pending ; and which, as it were, darkened his spirit within him, and hung round his neck like a millstone. If the issue of that inquiry should be adverse—he had absolutely nothing for it but instant flight from universal scorn and execration. Of what avail would then have been all his prodigious anxieties, sacrifices, and exertions, his deep-laid and complicated plans and purposes ? He would have irretrievably damned himself, for what ? To allow the wretch Titmouse to revel, for a season, in unbounded luxury and profligacy ! What single personal advantage had Mr. Gammon hitherto obtained for himself, taxed to their uttermost as had been his powerful energies for the last three years ? First of all, as to Miss Aubrey, the lovely object of his intense desires—what advance had he made towards the accomplishment of his objects ? Not a hair's-breadth. Nay, on the contrary, the slight footing of intimacy which he had contrived, in the first instance, to secure, he had now lost for ever. Could they have failed to perceive, in spite of all his devices, his hand in the recent persecution of Mr. Aubrey ? The stern deportment of Mr. Runnington, who had expressly prohibited on the part of Mr. Aubrey, all communication with that gentleman on the part of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, except through himself—the aforesaid Mr. Runnington—spoke volumes. Moreover, Mr. Gammon had chanced to be prowling about Vivian Street on the very evening on which Lord De la Zouch made his unexpected appearance with Mr. Aubrey, as already described ; and Gammon had seen Mr. Aubrey, Mrs. Aubrey, and Miss Aubrey, followed by his lordship, enter his carriage, in dinner-costume ; and he thought with a violent pang of one Mr. Delamere ! He had also ascertained how suddenly his lordship had come over from Paris—just at that crisis in the circumstances of the Aubreys ; and how probable was

it, that his lordship's potent interference had originated the formidable proceedings of the Ecclesiastical Court? And suppose the results of these proceedings should be, to detect the imposition by means of which Titmouse had been enabled to oust Mr. Aubrey from Yatton—what must *she*—what must they all—think of Mr. Gammon, after his avowal to Miss Aubrey? Inevitably, that he had either originally contrived, or was now conniving at, the imposture! And what if she really were now all the while engaged to the future Lord De la Zouch? And if the present Lord De la Zouch, with his immense revenues, were resolved to bear Mr. Aubrey through all his difficulties and troubles with a high hand? Had not Gammon already felt the heavy hand of Lord De la Zouch in the late accursed bribery actions? And suppose him stimulated to set on foot the pending proceedings, by the communication of Miss Aubrey concerning Mr. Gammon's own admissions to her—was his lordship likely to falter in his purposes!

Look again at the financial difficulties which were thickening around him. Between sixty and seventy thousand pounds had been already raised on mortgage of the Yatton estates!—and not a shilling more could now be raised without additional and collateral security, which Gammon could not procure. Then there was the interest payable on these mortgages, which alone swallowed up some £3,500 annually. In addition to this, Titmouse was over head-and-ears in debt; and he must be supported all the while in a manner suitable to his station; and an establishment must be kept up at Yatton. How, with all this, was Mr. Gammon's own dearly bought rent-charge to be realized? The already over-burdened property was totally unequal to bear this additional pressure. Again, if his motion which was to be made in the ensuing term for a new trial in the case of *Wigley v. Gammon* should fail, there he was left at the mercy of the plaintiff for a sum very considerably exceeding £3,000 (including the heavy costs), and capable of being immediately enforced by incarceration of his person, or seizure of his goods! Mr. Gammon, moreover, had been unfortunate in some gambling speculations in the funds, by which means the money he had so quickly made had been as quickly lost. It was true, there were the probable proceeds of the two promissory notes now put in suit against Mr. Aubrey, also the bond of Lord De la Zouch himself, in all amounting to twenty thousand pounds, with interest: but months must necessarily elapse before, even in the ordinary course, the actions for the recovery of these sums could be brought to a successful issue—to say nothing of any disastrous occurrence which Gammon could just conceive the possibility of, and which might have the effect of fatally impugning the right of action of Mr. Titmouse. Gammon had repeatedly turned in his mind the propriety of raising money by assignment of the bond of Lord De la Zouch, but for several reasons had deemed it inexpedient to venture upon such a step. For instance, the bond would be due within a month or two; and who would advance any serious sum on so large a security, without rigorous inquiries into the validity of the bond in point of exaction, and the right of the obligee to put it in suit? Supposing the issue of the ecclesiastical inquiry to be adverse, and Titmouse's title to the Yatton property to be destroyed; would not that at once invalidate his claims upon the two promissory notes? Lastly, his hopes of political advancement, to which he clung with incredible tenacity, full blooming though they had been till the moment of his being sued for the bribery penalties, were all in danger of being blighted for ever, unless he could succeed in defeating the verdict during the ensuing term, of which he entertained scarce any hope at all. But even supposing him successful there—what was to become of him if the issue of the ecclesiastical proceedings should brand him as abetting imposture of the most gross description—nay, as being in fact its originator? Once or twice, during his frequent agitating reviews of all these events and circumstances,

he caught, as it were, a ghastly glimpse of a sort of system of *retribution* in progress—and was able to trace evil consequences—from every single act which he had done!

Success or failure in the ecclesiastical suit, was now in fact the pivot upon which everything turned with Mr. Gammon—it would be either his salvation, or his destruction; and the thought of it kept him in a state of feverish trepidation and excitement, from morning to night—rendering him almost wholly incapable of attending to his professional business. He had gone down several times, accompanied by Mr. Quod, to ascertain, as far as was practicable, the course which things were taking. Mr. Quod was very sanguine indeed as to the issue; but, alas! Gammon had not ventured to tell him the true state of the case: so that Quod naturally confined himself to the substantiating of Mr. Timouse's pedigree, as it had been propounded, and with success, at the trial of ejectment. Mr. Gammon trembled at the systematic and vigorous prosecution of the cause on the part of Mr. Aubrey; what might it not elicit? Regardless of the consequences, he had several times tried to ascertain from those who had been examined, the course of inquiry which had been pursued, and the evidence which had been obtained from them—but in vain: some of the witnesses were in a station of society which repelled his advances; and others were effectually deterred from communicativeness by the injunctions of the commissioner. Thus Mr. Gammon could ascertain nothing—and was left to await, in fearful suspense, the issue of this tantalizing process, till the day when “publication” should “pass,” and both parties be put in possession of all the evidence which had been obtained.

The prospects of the Aubreys, brightened though they had been by the sudden interference of Lord De la Zouch at the very moment of their deepest gloom, did not disturb that calm and peaceful course of life which they had maintained through all their troubles. The beautiful bloom began to reappear on the cheeks both of Mrs. Aubrey and Kate, and the eye of Mr. Aubrey was no longer laden with gloom and anxiety. He pursued the study of the law with steadfast energy till the period of Mr. Mansfield's quitting town, and his chambers being closed till the beginning of November. The Aubreys, poor souls! secretly pined for a glimpse, however brief, of the pleasures of the country; and about the middle of September, they, sure enough, received a very pressing invitation from Lord and Lady De la Zouch, for all of them to join them in France, by the way of a total and enlivening change of scene. Mrs. Aubrey and Kate had all but persuaded Mr. Aubrey into an acceptance of the kind invitation, when he suddenly thought of what he deemed an insuperable obstacle. It will be borne in mind that Mr. Aubrey had given bail to a very large amount, nearly sixteen thousand pounds, in the two actions at the suit of Mr. Timouse, and of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, and, on inquiry, two of the friends who had become bail for him were abroad, and could not be communicated with; so Mr. Aubrey peremptorily refused, under such circumstances, to quit the country, though for ever so brief an interval. On seriously assuring Lord De la Zouch that there existed insuperable objections to his just then leaving England, the ever-active kindness of his noble friend prompted a fresh proposal—that they should, within a week's time, all of them, set off for a lovely residence of his lordship's in Essex, some fifteen miles from town, called Tunstall Priory—where they would find everything fully prepared for their reception, and where they were earnestly entreated to remain till they should be joined by their host and hostess from France, about the latter end of October. 'Tis quite impossible for me to describe the exhilaration of spirits with which, the invitation having been most gratefully accepted by Mr. Aubrey, they all prepared for their little journey. Mr. Aubrey had made arrangements for their going down by one of the coaches, which went within a couple of miles of the Priory; but here again

the thoughtful delicacy and kindness of his lordship was manifest ; for the evening before they set off, one of the servants from Dover Street came to ask at what hour they would wish the carriage to call for them, and the van for their luggage—such being the orders which had come from his lordship ; and further, that the carriage was to remain at their command during the whole of their stay at the Priory. Both Mrs. Aubrey and Kate, in their excitement, burst into tears on hearing of this additional trait of anxious and considerate kindness. Oh ! it would have cheered your heart, good reader, to see the blithe faces, and bounding spirits, with which that little family set off on the ensuing morning on their little expedition. Oh ! how refreshing was the country air !—how enlivening and beautiful the country scenery amid the gentle sunlight of September !—’Twas a Paradise of a place—and as day after day glided away, they felt a sense of the enjoyment of existence, such as they had never experienced before !

Though it is not a very pleasant transition, the order of events requires us to return to town—and to no very pleasant part of town, viz., Thavies’ Inn. ’Twas about eight o’clock in the evening, towards the close of October, and Mr. Gammon was walking to and fro about his room, which was cheerful with the light of a lamp and the warmth of a fire. He himself, however, was very far from cheerful—he was in a state of exquisite anxiety and suspense—and well he might be, for, he was in momentary expectation of receiving a copy of the evidence which had been taken on the part of Mr. Aubrey, in the ecclesiastical suit, publication having passed the day before. He muttered blighting curses at the intolerable delay of old Mr. Quod, who, Mr. Gammon was assured, might have procured a copy of the evidence several hours before, with only moderate exertion. Twice had Mr. Gammon’s messenger been despatched in vain ; and he was now absent on the third errand to Mr. Quod’s chambers. At length Mr. Gammon heard a heavy footstep ascending the stairs—he knew it, and, darting to the door, opened it just as his messenger had reached the landing with a bulky white packet under his arm, sealed, and tied with red tape.

“ Ah !—that will do. Thank you, thank you !—call to-morrow morning,” said Gammon hastily, almost snatching the packet out of the man’s hand.

“ Mrs. Brown—don’t let me be disturbed to-night by any one—on any consideration,” said he to his laundress ; and having ordered her to close the outer door, he re-entered his sitting-room, and with a beating heart burst open the seals, tape, and cartridge-paper, and fastened in an instant with devouring eyes upon the pregnant enclosure. Over page after page his eye glanced with lightning speed, his breathing unconsciously accelerated the while. When he had got to about the middle of it, his breath was for a moment or so suspended, while his affrighted eye travelled down a couple of pages, which told him all—all he had feared to see, and more—more than he had known himself. “ Ah, perdition—the game is up !” he faintly exclaimed, and, rising from his chair, threw himself down upon the sofa, in a state of dismay and bewilderment, which no words of mine are powerful enough to describe.

Quite as much anxiety had been felt on the same subject in a different quarter, during the whole of the day, at the Priory ; where were still the Aubreys, who had been joined a week before by Lord and Lady De la Zouch, and Mr. Delamere, for he had come over with them from the continent. Mr. Runnington had written to assure Mr. Aubrey, that the first moment of his being able to procure a copy of the evidence, he would come down post with it. As, however, nine o’clock elapsed without his having made his appearance, Mr. Delamere slipped out, and without announcing his attention, ordered his groom to have his horses in readiness instantly ; and within a quarter of an hour’s time he was on his way to town, having left a hasty verbal message acquainting Lord and Lady De la Zouch of the object of his sudden move

When he reached Mr. Runnington's offices he found no one there, to his infinite disappointment. Having slept in Dover Street, he reappeared at Mr. Runnington's about ten o'clock the next morning, and found a chaise and four at the door, into which Mr. Runnington, with a large packet under his arm, was in the very act of entering, to drive down to the Priory.

"How is it—for God's sake?" said Mr. Delamere, rushing forward to Mr. Runnington, who was sufficiently surprised at seeing him. "Oh, thank God! The battle's ours!"—replied Mr. Runnington with delighted excitement. "The murder's out!—I'll pledge my existence that within six months' time we have them all back at Yatton?" "You're off, are not you?" inquired Delamere, as excited as himself—"To be sure—won't you come with me?" replied Mr. Runnington. "Rattle away, my lads!" cried out Delamere to the post-boys—and the next moment they were on their way. In somewhere about an hour and a quarter's time, the reeking horses and dusty chaise dashed up to the hall door of the Priory; and, as Delamere caught one or two figures standing at the windows, he waved his hand in triumph through the chaise window. That brought Lord and Lady De la Zouch, and Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey, breathless to the door—out jumped Delamere, without waiting for the steps to be let down, and, grasping the hands of all four, exclaimed with enthusiasm—"Victory!—Victory!—but where is she—?" "Somewhere in the grounds, sir," replied a servant. "Mr. Runnington will tell you all"—said Delamere; and, springing off the step, was out of sight in a twinkling, in quest of Miss Aubrey to be the first—burning with the joyful news. He soon caught sight of her graceful figure—she was standing with her back towards him, apparently in a musing posture, gazing at the bubbling rivulet. Hearing his bounding steps, she turned round, and started at seeing him.

"Oh, Miss Aubrey—Kate, Kate!"—he stammered breathlessly—"By Heavens, we've won!"—Miss Aubrey turned very pale. "Oh, Mr. Delamere—you cannot be—I *hope* you are not mistaken—" said she faintly. "On my sacred word of honour I have seen—I have read it all myself! 'Tis as sure as that the sun is shining—'Tis all up with the villains!" Miss Aubrey made him no answer; her cheek continued white as that of a statue; and it was absolutely necessary that he should put his arm round her—if he had not, she would have fallen.

"Come!—Come! My sweet, my lovely Kate! Rouse yourself!" cried he, with fond anxiety, and pressed his lips gently on her forehead—a liberty of which she was probably not conscious, for she made no show of resistance. Presently she heaved a deep sigh, her eyes opened, and finding herself entirely in his embrace, she made a slight effort to disengage herself, but in vain. He was supporting her on one knee—for there was no bench or seat within view. She burst into tears, and they soon relieved her pent-up bosom of its excitement.

"Dearest Kate—it's glorious news, and I have been too hasty with it?" "No—no—Mr. Delamere? I am only overpowered with joy and with gratitude! Oh, Mr. Delamere, I could sink out of your sight!" "Pho! my own angel!—Don't make me miserable by talking in that strain!" "Well, what *shall* I say!" cried she passionately, bursting again into tears, and turning her face from him, feeling that it was reddening. "Say, Kate? That you will let me love you, and will love me in return! Come, my own Kate! Heaven smiles on you—smile you on *me*!" She spoke not—but sobbed, her face still averted from him. "I know you won't say me nay, Kate, if it's only for the *news* I've brought you express"—said Delamere ardently, and imprinted a passionate kiss on her unresisting lips.

"My sweet Kate! how I have thought of you in every part of the world in which I've been"—commenced Delamere, after having a second, and a third, and a fourth time imprinted his lips upon those of his beautiful and blushing

mistress—and Heaven only knows what other absurdities he might have been guilty of, when, to Kate's inconceivable embarrassment, behold a sudden turn brought them full in view of Lord and Lady De la Zouch and Mr. Runnington.

"My dear Miss Aubrey," cried Lord De la Zouch, "we have come to congratulate you on this great event!" and he grasped her affectionately by the hands, and then Lady De la Zouch embraced her future daughter-in-law, whose cheeks burned like fire, while those of Mr. Delamere tingled a little.

"Upon my honour, sir, you seem to have been making hay while the sun shines," said his lordship in a low tone, and laughing, having left Miss Aubrey and Lady De la Zouch together for a few moments.

"Dearest Lady De la Zouch, how did my brother bear it?" inquired Miss Aubrey.

"He bore it with calmness, though he turned very pale; but poor Mrs. Aubrey was very painfully excited—it was really a most affecting scene. But she is much better now—shall we return to the house?—By the way," added she slyly, "now you're *come into your fortune*, as the saying is, Kate—I—I suppose Geoffry has been talking nonsense to you!" Poor Kate blushed deeply, and burst into tears.

That was a happy day, and Mr. Runnington, having been compelled to stay to dinner, returned home at a late hour, feeling already richly repaid for all his exertions. Miss Aubrey sat up till a late hour in her own room writing, according to a promise she had given, a very long letter to Dr. Tatham, in which she gave him as full an account as she could of the surprising and decisive event which had happened. 'Twas quite the letter of a daughter to a fond father—full of ardent affection, and joyous anticipations of seeing him again; but as to the other little incident of the day, which concerned herself personally, Kate paused—laid down her pen—resumed it—blushed—hesitated—and at length extinguished her taper and retired to rest, saying to herself that she would *think* of it, and make up her mind by the morning.

The letter went off, however, after all, without the slightest allusion to the possibility of its lovely writer becoming a future Lady De la Zouch.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE reader may possibly bear in mind that Mr. Titmouse had established his right to succeed to the Yatton property, then enjoyed by Mr. Aubrey, by making out to the satisfaction of the jury, on the trial at York, that he, the aforesaid Mr. Titmouse, was descended from an elder branch of the Aubrey family: that there had existed an unsuspected female descendant of Stephen Dreddlington, the elder brother of Geoffry Dreddlington, through whom Mr. Aubrey derived his claim to his succession; and that this obscure female descendant had left issue equally obscure and unsuspected—viz., Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse—to whom *our* friend Titmouse was shown to be heir-at-law. In fact, it had been made out in open court, by clear and satisfactory evidence, *First*, that the aforesaid Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse was the direct descendant, through the female line, of Stephen Dreddlington; *Secondly*, had been shown to be the issue of the marriage of Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse; *Thirdly*, the birth of Tittlebat Titmouse, the first, and indeed the only issue of that marriage. All these were not only proved, but unquestionable facts; and for them as far as *descent* went, the preferable right of Titmouse to that of Aubrey, resulted as an inevitable inference, and the verdict went accordingly. But as soon as, according to the happy and invaluable suggestion of the Attorney-General, a rigid inquiry

had been instituted *on the spot*, whence the oral and documentary evidence had been obtained by Mr. Gammon—an inquiry conducted by persons infinitely more familiar with such matters than lawyers, those acute and indefatigable inquisitors succeeded in making the following remarkable discovery. It was found that the two old witnesses who had been called to prove that part of the case, on the trial, had since died—one of them very recently. But in pushing their inquiries, one or two other old witnesses were met with who had not been called by Mr. Gammon, even if he had been aware of their existence; and one of these, an old man, while being closely interrogated upon another matter, happened to let fall some expressions which startled the person making minutes of the evidence; for he spoke of Mr. Titmouse's mother under three different names, *Gubbins*, *Oakley*, and *Johnson*. Now, the proof of the trial had been simply the marriage of Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse, by banns, to Janet Johnson, *spinster*. Either, then, both the witnesses must be mistaken as to her having had other names, or there must be some strange mystery at the bottom of it—and so it at length turned out. This woman's maiden name had been Gubbins; then she had married a ropemaker, of the name of Oakley, in Staffordshire, but had separated from him, after two or three years' quarrelsome cohabitation, and gone into Yorkshire, where she had resided for some time with an aunt—in fact, no other a person than old Blind Bess. Afterwards, she had become acquainted with Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse; and, to conceal the fact of her previous marriage—her husband being alive at the time—she was married to Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse under the name of “Johnson.” Two years afterwards, this exemplary female died, leaving an only child, Tittlebat Titmouse. Shortly afterwards, his father came up to London, bringing with him his only son—and some five years afterwards died, leaving one or two hundred pounds behind him for the bringing up of Tittlebat decently—a duty undertaken by a distant relative of his father, and who had been dead some years. Of course Titmouse, at the time when he was first presented to the reader, knew no more than the dead of his being in any way connected with the distinguished family of the Aubreys in Yorkshire; nor of the very unpleasant circumstances attending his mother's marriage, with which the reader has just been made acquainted. Nothing can be easier than to conceive how Mr. Gammon might have been able, even if acquainted with the true state of the facts, to produce an impregnable case in court by calling, with judgment, only that evidence which was requisite to show the marriage of Titmouse's father with Janet Johnson—viz., an examined copy of an entry in the parish register of Grilston; of the fact of the marriage under the names specified; and some other slight evidence of the identity of the parties. How was the Attorney-General, or any one advising him, to have got at the mystery attending the name of “Johnson,” in the absence of suspicion pointed precisely at that circumstance?

The way in which Mr. Gammon became acquainted with the true state of the case was singular. While engaged in obtaining and arranging the evidence in support of the plaintiff's case, under the guidance of Mr. Lynx's opinion, Mr. Gammon stumbled upon a witness who dropped one or two expressions, which suddenly reminded him of two little documents which had been some time before put into his possession, without his having then attached the least importance to them. He was so disturbed at the coincidence, that he returned to town that very night to inspect the papers in question. They had been obtained by Snap from old Blind Bess; in fact, *inter nos*, he had purloined them from her on one of the occasions of his being with her in the manner long ago described, having found them in an old Bible which was in a still older canvas bag; and they consisted of, first, a letter from one James Oakley to his wife, informing her that he was dying, and that, having heard she was living with another man, he exhorted her to leave her wicked courses before *she* died;

secondly, a letter from one Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse to his wife, reproaching her with drunkenness and loose conduct, and saying that she knew as well as he did, that he could transport her any day he liked ; therefore, she had better mind what she was about. This letter was written in the county jail, whither he had been sent for some offence against the game-laws. Old Blind Bess had been very feeble when her niece came to live with her ; and, though aware of her profligate conduct, had never dreamed of the connection between the great family at the Hall and her niece's child. These were the two documents which Mr. Titmouse had destroyed, on Gammon's having entrusted them for a moment into his hands. Though I do not attach so much importance to them as Mr. Gammon did—since I cannot see how they could have been made available evidence for any purpose contemplated by Gammon—I am not surprised at his doing so. They were infinitely too dangerous documents to admit of his taking the opinion of counsel upon ; he therefore kept them entirely to himself, as also the discovery to which they led, not trusting his secret even to either of his partners. Before the case had come into Court, Mr. Gammon had been in possession of the facts now laid for the first time before the reader—contemplating, from the first, the use to be thereafter made of the prodigious power he should have become possessed of, in aid of his own personal advancement. Thus was Titmouse base-born indeed—in fact, doubly illegitimate ; for, first, his mother had been guilty of bigamy in marrying his father ; and, secondly, even had that not been so, her marrying under a false name had been sufficient to make the marriage utterly void, and equally, of course, to bastardize her issue.

Such, then, was the damning discovery effected by the ecclesiastical commission, and which would by and by blazon to the whole world the astounding fact, that this doubly base-born little wretch had been enabled by the profound machinations of Mr. Gammon, not only to deprive Mr. Aubrey of the Yatton estates, but also to intermarry with the Lady Cecilia, the last of the direct line of the noble Dreddlingtons and Drelincourts—to defile the blood, and blight the honour, of perhaps the oldest and the proudest of the nobility of England. Upon Mr. Gammon, it lit like a thunderbolt. For many hours he seemed to have been utterly crushed and blasted by it. His faculties appeared paralyzed. He was totally incapable of realizing his position—of contemplating the prodigious and appalling consequences which must inevitably and almost immediately ensue. He lay upon the sofa the whole night without closing his eyes, or having moved a muscle since he had thrown himself down upon it. His laundress came in with his bed-candle, trimmed the lamp, stirred the fire, and withdrew, supposing him asleep. The fire went out—then the lamp—and when, about eight o'clock the next morning, his laundress reappeared, he lay still on the sofa ; and a glimpse of his pale and haggard face alarmed her greatly. and she went for a medical man before he was aware of her having done so. On her returning, and informing him of what she had done, it roused him from his lethargy, and, rising from the sofa, he desired her to go back and request the medical man not to come, as it was unnecessary. Heaving profound sighs, he proceeded to his dressing-room, got through his toilet, and then sat down to the breakfast table, and for the first time made a very powerful effort to address his mind to the awful nature of the emergency into which he was driven. Mr. Quod soon after made his appearance.

"This is a *very-very-ugly business*, Mr. Gammon !" quoth he, with a gloomy countenance, as he sat down ; "I look upon it there's an end to the suit—eh !" "It is not likely that we shall stir further, certainly," replied Mr. Gammon, with a desperate effort to speak calmly : then there was a pause. "And I should think the matter can't end *here*," presently added Mr. Quod. "With such evidence as this, of course they'll attack Yatton !" "Then I am prepared to resist them," said Gammon ; convinced in his own mind that the

sole object of Mr. Quod's visit was to be seen after the payment of his bill—a reasonable anxiety, surely, considering the untoward issue of the proceedings.

"How could all this have escaped *me*, in getting up the case for the trial?" said Gammon after a pause, darting an anxious and furtive glance at his companion.

"Ay—I hope this will teach you common-law fellows that there's a trick or two worth knowing at Doctor's Commons!" replied Mr. Quod. "D'ye remember what I told you at starting?—How was it, d'ye say, *you* couldn't find it out? No one could, till we did!—But, by the way, do we fight any more in the cause? Because we must decide at once—it's no use, I should say, going to the expense of a hearing——"

"I will give you an answer in the course of the day, Mr. Quod," replied Gammon with an air of repressed fury; and succeeded in getting rid of his visitor for the present; and then reperused the whole of the evidence, and considered within himself, as well as he was able, what course he ought to pursue. He had need, truly, to do so, for he very shortly found that he had to deal with an enemy in Mr. Runnington—uncompromising and unrelenting—whose movements were equally prompt, vigorous and skilful. That gentleman, following up his blow, and acting under the advice of Sir Charles Wolstenholme, who had just returned to town for the commencement of the legal year—viz., Michaelmas Term—first of all gave notice, through Mr. Pounce, of his intention to proceed with the suit for administration; but found that the enemy in that quarter had struck; Mr. Quod formally notified his abandonment of opposition on the part of Mr. Titmouse. So far so good. Mr. Runnington's next step was to go down into Staffordshire and Yorkshire, accompanied by Mr. Pounce, and by his own experienced confidential clerk, in order to ascertain still more distinctly and conclusively the nature of the evidence which was in existence impeaching the legitimacy of Mr. Titmouse. His inquiries were so satisfactory, that, within a week of his return to town, he had caused an action of ejectment to be brought for the recovery of the whole of the Yatton property; and copies of the "Declaration" to be served on Mr. Titmouse and on every tenant in possession upon the estate. Then he served notices on them, calling upon each and every of them not to pay rent in future to any one except Charles Aubrey, Esquire, or his agents by him lawfully appointed; and caused a formal demand of the title-deeds of the estate to be forthwith served upon Mr. Titmouse, Messrs. Bloodsuck and Son, and Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and also advertisements to be inserted in the newspapers, to caution all persons against advancing money on mortgage or on any other security of the Yatton property, "formerly in possession of, and now claimed by, Charles Aubrey, Esq., but at present wrongfully held by Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq., M.P., and for the recovery of which an action has been commenced, and is now pending;" and also from advancing money "on the faith or security of a certain bond conditioned in the penalty of £20,000 for the payment to Tittlebat Titmouse of £10,000, with interest, on or before the 24th of January next, and dated the 26th July, 18—, and signed by Lord De la Zouch and Charles Aubrey, Esq., the same having been obtained by undue means, and on a false and fraudulent pretence of money being due from the said Charles Aubrey, Esq., to the aforesaid Tittlebat Titmouse."

These advertisements, and certain paragraphs relating to the same matter, which found their way into the newspapers, to the consternation of Gammon, came under the eye of the Duke of Tantallan, and struck him dumb with dismay and horror at so decisive and public a corroboration of his worst fears. A similar effect they produced upon Miss Macspleuchan, who, however, succeeded in keeping them for some time from the observation of the unfortunate Earl of Dreddington. But there were certain other persons in whom these announcements excited an amazing degree of excitement and agitation: viz.,

three Jewish gentlemen, Mordecai Gripe, Mephibosheth Maharshalal-hash-baz, and Israel Fang, who were at present the depositaries of Mr. Titmouse's title-deeds, with a lien upon them, as they had fondly imagined, to the extent of nearly seventy thousand pounds, that being the amount of money they had advanced in hard cash, to Mr. Titmouse, upon mortgage of his Yatton estates. The last of these unfortunate gentlemen—old Mr. Fang—had advanced no less a sum than twenty thousand pounds. He had been the first applied to, and had most fortunately taken a collateral security for the whole sum advanced; viz., a bond—the bond of our old friend, “Thomas Tag-rag, draper and mercer, of No. 375, Oxford Street, and Satin Lodge, Clapham, in the county of Surrey.” As soon as ever the dismayed Israelite, by his attorney, had ascertained, by inquiry at the office of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—where all was confusion—that there really was a claim set up to the whole of the estates, on behalf of him who had been so recently and suddenly dispossessed of them, he exclaimed in an ecstasy, “Oh, ma Got! oh, ma *dear* Got! Shoo Tag-rag! Shoo on the bond! Looshe no time”—and he was obeyed.

Terrible to tell, two big bum-bailiffs the next day walked into the shop of Mr. Tag-rag, who was sitting, his pen in his hand, busily checking some bills just made out, and without the least ceremony hauled him off, hardly giving him time to put his hat on, but gruffly uttering in his ear some such astounding words as “Thirty thousand pounds!” He resisted desperately, shouting out for help, on which all the young men jumped over the counters, and seemed to be coming to the rescue! while one or two female customers rushed affrighted out of the shop. The young men merely crowded round, and clamoured loudly, without venturing upon a conflict with the two myrmidons of the law, who clapped their prize into a coach that was standing opposite—Mr. Tag-rag, frothing at the mouth, and with impassioned gesticulation, protesting that he would have them both transported to Botany Bay. They laughed at him good-humouredly, and in due time deposited him safely in the lock-up of Mr. Vice, who, on seeing that he was disposed to be troublesome, thrust him unceremoniously into the large room in which, it may be recollected, Mr. Aubrey had been for a few minutes incarcerated, and left him, telling him he might write to his attorney. There he continued for a long while in a state bordering on frenzy. Indeed, he must have fancied that the devil had made it, just then, his particular business to worry and ruin *him*; for what do you think had happened to him only two days before? an event which had convulsed Clapham to its centre—so much, at least, of Clapham as knew of the existence of the Tag-rags and the Reverend Dismal Horror, his chapel and congregation. That young shepherd of faithful souls having long cherished feelings of ardent fondness towards one gentle lamb in his flock in particular—viz., Tabitha Tag-rag—who was the only child of the wealthiest member of his little church—took upon himself to lead her, nothing loth, a very long and pleasant ramble—in plain English, Mr. Dismal Horror had eloped with the daughter of his head deacon—to the infinite scandal and disgust of his congregation, who forthwith met and deposed him from his pulpit; after which his father-in-law solemnly made his will, bequeathing everything he had to a newly-established Dissenters’ college; and the next day—being just about the time that the grim priest of Gretna was forging the bonds of Hymen for the happy and lovely couple before him, Mr. Tag-rag was hauled off in the way that I have mentioned—which two occurrences would have the effect of enabling Mr. Dismal Horror to prove the disinterestedness of his attachment—an opportunity for which he vowed that he panted—inasmuch as he and she had become, indeed, all the world to each other. He must now go into some other line of business, in order to support his fond and lovely wife;

and, as for Tag-rag, his pious purposes were frustrated altogether. There was no impeaching the validity of the bond held by the inexorable Jew who had arrested him, and who clearly had been no party to any fraud by which—if any—the signature of Mr. Tag-rag had been procured to the bond. Mr. Tag-rag's attorney, Mr. Snout, instantly called upon Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, to inquire into the particulars of the astounding transaction by which his client had been drawn into so ruinous a liability—but was very cavalierly treated; for he was informed that Mr. Tag-rag must, in their opinion, have lost his senses—at all events his memory; for that he had most deliberately executed the bond, after its nature had been fully explained to him by Mr. Gammon—and his signature was witnessed and attested in the usual way by a clerk in the office, and in the presence of all three partners. On hearing all this—and examining Mr. Amminadab, who stated, without any hesitation, as the fact in truth was, that he had been called in especially to see Mr. Tag-rag execute the bond, and had seen and heard him deliberately sign and say he delivered it as his act and deed—Mr. Snout hurried back to his frenzied client, and endeavoured, for a long while, to reason with him, explaining to him the glaring improbability of his version of the affair. This led to very high words indeed between them, and at length Mr. Tag-rag actually spit in his face; and Mr. Snout, being a very little man, and unable to resent the insult effectually, instantly quitted the room, expressing his firm belief that Mr. Tag-rag was a swindler, and he would no more be concerned for a person of that description. Mr. Tag-rag could not get bail for so frightful an amount; so he committed an act of bankruptcy, by remaining in prison for three weeks. Down, then, came all his creditors upon him in a heap, especially the Jew; a rattling bankruptcy ensued—the upshot of the whole being—to anticipate, however, a little—that a first and final dividend was declared of three-farthings in the pound—for it turned out that he had been *speculating* a great deal more than any one had had the least idea of. I ought, however, to have mentioned that, as soon as Mr. Tag-rag had become bankrupt, and his assignees had been appointed, they caused an indictment to be preferred against Mr. Titmouse, and Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, for fraud and conspiracy in obtaining the bond from Mr. Tag-rag; and, on the same grounds, made an application, fortified by strong affidavits, to the Lord Chancellor, to strike them all off the rolls. In addition to all this, the two other unfortunate mortgagees, Mordecai Gripe, and Mephibosheth Maharshalal-hash-baz—who had no security at all for their advances except the title-deeds of the estate, and the personal covenant of Mr. Titmouse—beset the office in Saffron Hill from morning to night, like a couple of frantic fiends, and nearly drove poor old Quirk out of his senses. Mr. Snap was peremptory and insolent; while Gammon seldom made his appearance—and would see no one at his private residence, pleading serious indisposition.

After anxious reflection, Mr. Gammon did not absolutely despair of extricating himself from the perils with which he was environed. As for certain fond hopes of political advancement, he did not despair of prevailing on his friends at headquarters to overlook the accident which had befallen him, in the adverse verdict for the bribery penalties, even should he fail in his motion to defeat that verdict in the ensuing term. He had had a distinct intimation that—that one obstacle removed—a very important and influential situation under government was within his reach. But, alas! this last overwhelming misfortune—how could he possibly evade or surmount it? What human ingenuity or intrepidity could avail to extricate him from the consequences of his avowal to Miss Aubrey—and his counter-statements to the Duke of Tantallan and Miss Macspleuchan—to say nothing of the Earl of Dreddlington? He resolved to risk it—to rely on his own resources, and the chapter of accidents. The mere presence of difficulty strung his nerves to encounter it. He resolved to rely on

the impossibility of fixing him directly with a knowledge of the rottenness of Titmouse's pretensions—at all events, till a period considerably subsequent to the trial, and Titmouse's marriage with the Lady Cecilia. It occurred to him, as calculated, moreover, to aid his contemplated movements, if he could find a fair pretext for throwing overboard his partners, especially Mr. Quirk—satisfied that his own uniform caution had prevented him from committing himself to them—or at least had deprived them of means of proving it. He very soon met with an opportunity, of which he promptly availed himself.

Some week or ten days after the commencement of the term, Mr. Quirk was walking down Parliament Street, on his way to the Court of King's Bench, hoping, amongst other things, to hear the court say whether they would grant or refuse a rule *nisi* for a new trial, in a certain cause of *Wigley v. Gammon*, which had been moved for on the first day of term by Sir Charles Wolstenholme, and which Lord Widdrington had said the court would take a day or two's time to consider. Mr. Quirk's eye caught the figure of a person, a few steps in advance of him, which he fancied he had seen before. In a few minutes' time the old gentleman was covered with a cold perspiration; for in a young man, about thirty years old, decently dressed—thin, sallow, and wearing a very depressed air—Mr. Quirk recognized Mr. *Steggars*—a gentleman whom he had imagined to be at that moment comfortably settled at Botany Bay! This was the individual, it may be recollected, whose breach of trust, when a clerk of Mr. Parkinson's at Grilston, had led to Mr. Quirk's discovery of the infirmity in Mr. Aubrey's title. The fact was, that Mr. Steggars had quitted England, as the reader may recollect, disgusted with Mr. Quirk's conduct towards him; and had also subsequently experienced some little remorse on account of his own mean and cruel conduct towards a gentleman and his amiable family. He had contrived to make his feelings upon the subject known to an official individual at Botany Bay, who had given him an opportunity of explaining matters fully to the authorities at home—the principal of whom, the Home Secretary, had been, and indeed continued to be, a warm personal friend of Mr. Aubrey's. The minister caused inquiries to be made concerning Steggars' behaviour while abroad, which was so satisfactorily answered as to procure a remission of the remainder of his sentence, just as he was entering upon his fourth year's service at Botany Bay. Immediately on his return—which had taken place only a few days before the commencement of Michaelmas term—he sought out Mr. Aubrey's attorneys, Messrs Runnington, and put them fully in possession of all the facts of the case relating to Mr. Quirk's grossly dishonourable conduct in obtaining and acting upon a knowledge of the supposed defect in Mr. Aubrey's title. Upon Mr. Quirk's coming alongside of this gentleman, and looking at him with a most anxious inquisitiveness, he encountered a fearfully significant glance—and then Mr. Steggars, in a very pointed and abrupt manner, crossed over the street for the purpose of avoiding him. Mr. Quirk was so dreadfully disconcerted by this occurrence, that instead of going on to court, where he would have heard Mr. Gammon's rule for a new trial *refused*, he retraced his steps homeward, and arrived at the office just as a clerk was inquiring for him; and who, on seeing him, put into his hands the following startling document, being a "*Rule*," which had been granted the day before, by the Court of King's Bench:—

"On reading the Affidavit of *Jonathan Steggars*, the affidavits of James Parkinson and Charles Runnington, and the paper-writing marked A, all hereto annexed, It is *ordered* that Caleb Quirk, Gentleman, an attorney of this Honourable Court, do, on Wednesday next, in this present term, show cause why he should not forthwith deliver up to Charles Aubrey, Esquire, the deeds and documents specified in the paper-writing hereto annexed, marked A, *and also, why he should not answer the matters contained in the said Affidavits*. Upon the motion of Sir Charles Wolstenholme.

"By the Court."

"Oh Lord!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk faintly, and, sinking into his chair, inquired for Mr. Gammon; but, as usual, he had not been at the office that day. Giving orders to Mr. Amminadab to have copies taken immediately of the affidavits mentioned in the rule, Mr. Quirk set off for Mr. Gammon's chambers, but missed that gentleman, who, he learned, was down at court. The next day Mr. Gammon called at the office, but Mr. Quirk was absent; on going, however, into the old gentleman's room, Mr. Gammon's eye lit on the above-mentioned "rule," and also on the affidavits upon which it had been granted. Having hurriedly glanced over them, he hastily replaced them on the desk, as he had found them, and repaired to his own room greatly flustered—resolved to wait for Mr. Quirk's arrival, and appear to be informed by him, for the first time, of the existence of the aforesaid rule and affidavits. While he was really buried in a reverie, with his head resting on one hand and a pen in the other, his countenance miserably pale and harassed, Mr. Quirk burst hastily into his room with the rule and affidavits in his hand.

"Oh Lord, Gammon! How are you, Gammon?" he stuttered. "Haven't seen you this age!—Where have you been? How are you, eh?" and he grasped very cordially the cold hand of Mr. Gammon, which did not return the pressure. "I am not very well, Mr. Quirk; but—you seem agitated!—Has anything fresh hap—" "Fresh?—Ecod, my dear Gammon! Fresh, indeed! Here's a *new* enemy come into the field!—D—d if I don't feel going mad!—Look, Gammon, look!"—and he placed the rule and affidavits in Mr. Gammon's hands, and sat down beside him. "What!—*Answer the matters of the affidavit?*" quoth Gammon amazedly.—"Why, what have you been doing, Mr. Quirk? And—who upon earth is *Jonathan Steggars?*" "Who's Steggars!" echoed Mr. Quirk stupidly. "Yes, Mr. Quirk—*Steggars*. Who is he?" repeated Gammon intrepidly.

"Steggars, you know—Gammon! You recollect Steggars, of course—eh?" inquired Mr. Quirk with an apprehensive stare—"Steggars; *Steggars*—you know! eh? You don't recollect! Oh, botheration! Come, come, Gammon!"

"Who is he?" again inquired Gammon, somewhat sternly. "Oh Lud! oh Lud! oh Lud!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk despairingly—"What *are* you after, Gammon? You don't intend—it can't be—that you're going to—eh?—It's Steggars, you know—we defended him, you know—and he got transported for robbing Parkinson. You recollect how we got hold of Mr. Aubrey's story from him?"

While Mr. Quirk was saying all this with feverish impetuosity, Mr. Gammon appeared to be, for the first time, glancing eagerly over the affidavits.

"Why—good heavens, Mr. Quirk?" said he, presently, with a start—"is it possible that these statements can have the slightest foundation in fact?"

"Ay, drat it—that *you* know as well as I do, Gammon," replied Mr. Quirk, with not a little eagerness and trepidation—"Come, come, it's rather late in the day to sham Abraham just now."

"Do you venture, Mr. Quirk, to stand there and deliberately charge me with being a party to the grossly dishonourable conduct of which you are here accused upon oath—which, indeed, you admit yourself to have been guilty of?" "D—d if I don't, Master Gammon!" replied Mr. Quirk, slapping his hand on the table after a long pause, in which he looked completely confounded. "Why, you'll want, by and by, to persuade me that my name isn't Caleb Quirk—why, zounds! you'll drive me mad? You're gone mad yourself—you must be!" "How dare you insult me, sir, by charging me with conniving at your infamous and most unprofessional conduct?" "Why—come! You don't know how we *first* got scent of the whole thing?—Ah, ha! it dropped down from the clouds, I suppose, into our office—oh lud, lud, Gammon! it isn't kind to leave an old friend in the lurch at such a *horrid* pinch as this?" "I tell you, Mr. Quirk,

that I never had the least idea in the world that this wretch Steggars—Faugh! I should have scouted the whole thing! I would rather have retired from the firm!” “That’s it, Gammon! Go on, Gammon! this is uncommonly funny! It is, indeed, ah, ha!” “This is no time for trifling, sir, believe me. Let me tell you this much, in all candour—that I certainly had, from the first, misgivings as to the means by which you became possessed of this information; but, considering our relative situations, I did not feel myself at liberty to press you on the point—Oh, Mr. Quirk, I am really shocked beyond all bounds! What will the profession think of—” “D—the profession! What d’ye think I must be just now thinking of *you*? Why, you’d make a dog strike its father!” “I may have been unfortunate, Mr. Quirk—I may have been imprudent; but I have never been dishonourable—and I would not for the whole creation have my name associated with this infernal transac—”

“Come, come—who wanted me to forge a tombstone, Gammon?” inquired Mr. Quirk, glancing very keenly at his friend. “Wanted you to forge a tombstone, sir!” echoed Gammon with an air of astonishment. “Ay! ay! Forge a tombstone!” repeated Mr. Quirk, dropping his voice, and slapping one hand upon the other. “Upon my word and honour, Mr. Quirk, I pity you! You’ve lost your senses.” “You wanted me to forge a tombstone! D—d if you didn’t!” “You had better go home, Mr. Quirk, and take some physic to clear your head, for I am sure you’re going wrong altogether!” said Gammon. “Oh, Gammon, Gammon! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself? Come—honour among thieves! Be honest for once—” “Your conduct is so extraordinary, Mr. Quirk, that I must request you to leave my room, sir—” “I sha’n’t—it’s *mine* too”—quoth Quirk, snapping his fingers with a desperate air. “Then I will, sir,” replied Gammon with a low bow; and, taking up his hat, moved towards the door. “You sha’n’t, Gammon—you musn’t!” cried Quirk, but in vain—Mr. Gammon had taken his final departure, leaving Mr. Quirk on the very verge of madness.

By and by he went into Snap’s room, who sat there the picture of misery and terror; for whereas it had always seemed to him that he had never been fairly admitted into the confidence of his senior partners in the very important matters which had been going on for the last two years—now, that everything was going wrong, he was candidly given credit by Mr. Quirk and Mr. Gammon for having lent a helping hand to everything from the very beginning! In fact, he was frightened out of his wits at the terrible turn things were taking. ’Twas he that had to stand the brunt of the horrid badgering of the three frenzied Jews; he was included in half-a-dozen indictments for fraud and conspiracy, at the instance of these three accursed Jews, and of the assignees of Mr. Tag-rag; and Heaven only could form a notion of what other things were in store for him! He wondered vastly that they had not contrived to stick *his* name into the affidavits which had that day come in, and which seemed to have turned Mr. Quirk’s head upside down. But, conscious of his own innocence, he resolved to hold on to the last, with a view, in the event of the partnership blowing up of scraping together a nice little practice out of the remnants.

Half recklessly, and half in furtherance of some designs which he was forming, Gammon followed up, on the ensuing morning, his move with Mr. Quirk, by sending to him and to Mr. Snap a formal written notice of his intention to retire from the partnership, in conformity with the provisions of their articles, at the end of a calendar month from the date; and he resolved to take no part at all in the matter to which Mr. Quirk’s attention had been so sternly challenged by the Court of King’s Bench—leaving Mr. Quirk to struggle through it as best he might. But what was Mr. Gammon to do? He could not stir a step in any direction for want of money—getting every hour more and more involved and harassed on this score. The ecclesiastical suit he had given up, and Mr. Quod

had instantly sent in his heavy bill, requiring immediate payment—reminding Mr. Gammon that he had pledged himself to see him paid, whatever might be the issue. Here, again, was an action of ejectment, on a tremendous scale, actually commenced, and being vigorously carried on for the recovery of every acre of the Yatton property. Was it to be resisted? Where were the funds? Here he was, again, already a defendant in four indictments, charging fraud and conspiracy—proceedings entailing a most destructive expense; and his motion for a new trial in the action for the bribery penalty having failed, he was now liable to pay, almost instantly, some £2,500 to the plaintiff for debt and costs. As for the balance of their bill against Mr. Aubrey, that was melting away hourly in the taxing-office; and the undoubted result would be an action against them, at the suit of Mr. Aubrey, for a malicious arrest. Was it possible, thought Gammon, to make the two promissory notes of Mr. Aubrey available, by discontinuing the actions, and indorsing over the notes at a heavy discount? He took an opinion upon the point—which was to the effect that such a step could not be taken, so as to give any third party a better right against Mr. Aubrey than Mr. Titmouse had. But even had this been otherwise, an unexpected obstacle arose in Mr. Spitfire, who now held Mr. Gammon at arm's length, and insisted on going forward with the actions—when he, in his turn, was, as it were, checkmated by a move of Mr. Runnington's in the Court of Chancery; where he obtained an injunction against proceeding with the actions, till the result of the pending action of ejectment should have been ascertained; and in the event of the lessor of the plaintiff recovering, an account taken of the mesne profits which had been received by Mr. Titmouse. No one, of course, would now advance a farthing on mortgage of Mr. Titmouse's interest in the Yatton property; and Mr. Gammon's dearly-earned rent-charge of £2,000 a-year had become mere waste parchment, and as such he destroyed it. The advertisements concerning Lord De la Zouch's bond had effectually restrained Mr. Gammon from raising anything upon it; since any one advancing money upon the security of its assignment, must have put it in suit against his lordship, when due, in the name of Mr. Titmouse, and any answer to an action by him would, of course, operate against the party using his name. Mr. Gammon then bethought himself of felling the timber at Yatton; but, as if that step on his part had been anticipated, before they had got down more than a couple of trees at the extremity of the estate, down came an injunction from the Lord Chancellor, and so there was an end of all resources from that quarter. Should he try the experiment of offering to surrender Yatton without the delay and expense of defending the ejectment? He knew he should be laughed at; they must quickly see that he had no funds to fight with, even had he the slightest case to support. Mr. Gammon saw that Mr. Aubrey's position was already impregnable, and the notion of a compromise utterly ridiculous. As for resources of his own, he had none, for he had been exceedingly unfortunate in his dealings in the British and Foreign funds, and had suffered severely and unexpectedly through his connection with one or two of the bubble companies of the day. In fact he was liable to be called upon at any moment for no less a sum than £3,000, and interest, which had been advanced to him on security of a joint and several bond given by himself and Mr. Titmouse; and he lived in daily dread lest the increasing frequency of the rumours to his discredit, should get to the ears of this particular creditor, and precipitate his demand of repayment.

To the vexation occasioned by this direct pecuniary embarrassment, and by the impossibility of retrieving himself by a move in any direction—being in short, in a complete *deadlock*—were to be added other sources of exquisite anxiety and mortification. To say nothing of the perilous legal and criminal liabilities which he had incurred, the consciousness of his appearing an atrocious liar, and indeed an impostor, in the eyes of the Duke of Tantallan, of the

Earl of Dreddlington, of Miss Macspleuchan, of the Aubreys, of *Miss Aubrey*—in fact, of every one who saw or heard of what he had done—stung him almost to madness. And when he reflected that the Lord Chancellor, to whose favourable notice he had ever fondly aspired—and, to a considerable extent, successfully—had been put in possession of all the heavy charges made against him, on the score of fraud and conspiracy, by means of the various motions made before his lordship, and the affidavits by which they were supported, he felt his soul withered within him. In short, it must surely appear, by this time, that the devil had, in his dismal sport, got his friend Mr. Gammon up into a corner.

In like manner Mr. Titmouse had his lesser troubles—for he was all of a sudden reduced very nearly to the verge of literal starvation. His creditors of every kind and degree seemed actuated by the spirit of the law of the Twelve Tables—which, when a debtor was insolvent, permitted his creditors to cut him, bodily, physically, into pieces, in proportion to the respective magnitudes of their claims against him. Actions were commenced against him by the three Jews, on his covenants to repay the principal and interest due on the mortgages; half-a-dozen actions were pending against him on bills of exchange and promissory notes, which he had given for various sums of money, which had been lent him on terms of the most monstrous usury. Scarcely was there a single tradesman in town or country with whom he had ever dealt, that had not sued or was not about to sue him. Every article of furniture both at Yatton and at his lodgings—great or small, cabs, harness, horses—all had disappeared; and, but for the protection afforded to his person by privilege of Parliament, he would have been pounced upon by at least a hundred ravenous and infuriate creditors in an instant, and never been seen or heard of any more, except on the occasion of some feeble and vain cry for relief under the Insolvent Debtors' Act. He had been obliged, on coming up from Yatton, to borrow five pounds from poor Dr. Tatham!—who, though infinitely surprised at the application, and greatly inconvenienced by compliance with it, lent him cheerfully the sum he asked for; Titmouse, the little scamp, pledging himself to enclose the Doctor a five-pound note by the first post after his reaching town. That, however, even had he ever intended giving the matter a thought, he could no more have done than he could have sent Dr. Tatham the mitre of the Archbishop of Canterbury; in consequence of which the worthy little Doctor was obliged to postpone his long-meditated purchase of a black coat and breeches indefinitely. The morning after Titmouse's return, he betook himself to Saffron Hill, which he reached just as Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap, deserted by Mr. Gammon, were endeavouring, in great tribulation and terror, to concoct affidavits in answer to those on which the rule in the Court of King's Bench had been obtained. Mr. Amminadab, with a little hesitation, yielded to his importunities, and allowed him to go into Mr. Quirk's room.

"Oh Lud! Oh Lud!—you—you—you—infernal little villain!" cried out Mr. Quirk, hastily approaching him, pale and stuttering with fury—and, taking him by the collar, turned him by main force out of the room.

"I say!—I say!—Come, sir! I'm a member of——" "I'll *member* you, you impostor! Get out with you!—get out!" "So help me——! I'll go to some other attor——" gasped Titmouse, ineffectually struggling against Mr. Quirk. "Eugh!—Beast!" exclaimed Snap, who kept by the side of Mr. Quirk, ready to give any assistance that might be requisite. "What have I—eh?—What have I done—demme!—Come, come—hollo! hands off——" "If ever—if ever—if ever you dare show your cursed little face here—again!"—sputtered Mr. Quirk, trembling with rage. "This is breach of privilege!—On my life I'll—I really *will*—I'll complain to the House to-night."

By this time he had been forced through the outer door into the street, and the door closed furiously behind him. A little crowd was instantly collected around him, and he might possibly have thought of addressing them, in terms of indignant eloquence, but he was deterred by the approach of a policeman with a very threatening countenance, and slunk down Saffron Hill in a shocking state of mind. Then he hurried to Thavies' Inn, pale as death—and with a tremulous voice inquired for Mr. Gammon; but that gentleman had given special orders to be invariably denied to him. Again and again he called—and was again and again repulsed; and though he lingered on one or two occasions for an hour at least, in order to waylay Mr. Gammon, it was in vain. Letter after letter he sent, but with no better effect; and at length the laundress refused to take them in.

Gammon *dared* not see Titmouse; not because he feared Titmouse, but himself.

The House of Commons was sitting, unusual as was such an occurrence at that time of the year; but Parliament had been called together on a special urgency, and a very fierce and desperate contest was carrying on between the Opposition and the Ministers, whose very existence was at stake, and almost nightly divisions were melting down their majority till they were within an ace of being in a positive minority. Under these circumstances, although Mr. Titmouse's position had become a matter of notoriety, and he could no longer exhibit in public even the outside show and trappings of a man of fashion, beyond his mere personal finery (which had become very precious, because he saw no means of replacing it), and though he was *cut*, as a matter of course, by every one out of doors, yet he found he had one friend, at least, in his extremity, who scorned to imitate the fickle and perfidious conduct of all around him. That frank and manly individual was no less a person, to his honour be it spoken, than the Secretary of the Treasury—and *whipper-in*—Mr. Flummery; who always spoke to him in the most cordial and confiding manner, and once or twice even asked him to join his dinner-table at Bellamy's. On one of these occasions, Mr. Titmouse resolved to put Mr. Flummery's friendship to the test, and boldly asked for "*a place*." His distinguished friend appeared certainly startled for a moment, and then evidently felt inwardly tickled, as was evinced by a faint twitching at the corners of his mouth. He proceeded, however, in a very confidential manner, to ask Mr. Titmouse as to his familiarity with financial matters; for (in the most sacred confidence) it did so happen that although no one knew it but himself and one other person, there was to be a vacancy in a certain office within a fortnight at furthest; and without saying anything further, Mr. Flummery laid his finger on his lip, and looked steadfastly at Titmouse, who did similarly; and within half an hour's time made one of a glorious majority of four, obtained by the triumphant Ministry.

Titmouse was now in excellent spirits concerning his future prospects, and felt that, if he could but contrive to hold on during the fortnight intervening between him and his accession to office, all would be well. He therefore conceived he had nothing to do but apply to some one or two friends, whom he had accommodated with loans, for repayment. But, alas! Mr. O'Doodle acknowledged that his exchequer was empty just then; and Mr. M'Squash said he really fancied he had repaid Mr. Titmouse the hundred pounds which he had lent him, but would look and see. Then Mr. Titmouse ventured to apply to Mr. O'Gibbet—that gentleman being Titmouse's debtor to the tune of some five hundred pounds. He called Mr. Titmouse aside, and in the most delicate and feeling manner intimated the delight it would have afforded him to respond to the call of Mr. Titmouse under ordinary circumstances; but the fact was, he felt placed in a most painfully embarrassing position, on account of the grave doubts which had occurred to him, as to the right of Mr. Titmouse either to have lent

the money at all, or, consequently, to receive repayment of it. In short, the lawyers would call this setting up the *jus tertii*; Mr. O'Gibbet protesting that he looked upon himself, in point of conscience, as a trustee of the money for the real owner; and, till he should have been discovered, bound to retain it—so pleasant is *sometimes* the performance of one's duty! Titmouse could not in the least appreciate these exquisite scruples; but knowing Mr. O'Gibbet's influence over Mr. Flummery, he feigned to acquiesce in the propriety of what was advanced by Mr. O'Gibbet, who, on being pressed, *lent* him five pounds.

Finding that those whom he had till then imagined bound to consider his interests, had, in so unprincipled and ungrateful a manner, deserted him, he resolved to be true to himself, and bent all the powers of his mind to the contemplation of his present circumstances. After reflection, a very felicitous stroke occurred to him. He did not know the exact state of the question with reference to the possession of Yatton—little dreaming that, in point of fact, Mr. Aubrey was at that moment virtually reinstated in the enjoyment of that fine estate. Now, it occurred to Mr. Titmouse as very probable, that his opponent would catch at any fair offer of a compromise, since he—Titmouse—had unquestionably the advantage over him at present, having nine-tenths of the law on his side—viz., *possession*; and if he were to propose to split their differences by making an offer of his hand and heart to Miss Aubrey, it could do no harm, and *might* be attended with the happiest results. How was she to know the desperate shifts to which he was driven at present? And if he could but contrive, consistently with his pledge to Mr. Flummery, to give her an inkling of the brilliant prospects that awaited him! In short, I am able to give the reader an exact copy of a letter which, after infinite pains, two days being spent over it, he sent to Miss Aubrey; and which was duly forwarded to her, and deposited in her hands, as she alighted from her horse, on returning from a ride with Mr. Delamere and Lord De la Zouch. Here follows that skilful and touching performance:—

“ House of Commons,
“ Wednesday, Nov.—, 18—.

“(Private.)

“ Madam,—hoping That this Will not Disappoint you Through Strangeness (which I own Looks Somewhat So) at First sight of my Addressing This Epistle to You, to Say Ever since I Have had The unhapiness to be a Widdower Since the Death of Lady Cecilia Titmouse of which There Is Many False accounts Every Thing Goes Entirely Wrong (For the present) with me, all For Want of a Lady Which w^d feel That Conubial Interest in me, That is So delightful In The Married State. I was Honoured With writing To You soon After I was so Happy as to Get the Property But Suppose you could not Have Got It Seeing I Got No Ans^r. And Natrally suposed There Was obstacles In The Way For it Was Settled Soon as You might have Heard That I was to Mary my Cousin (The Lady Cecilia) whom I Loved Truly till Death cut Her Short On her Way To an Erly Grave, Alas. I know It is In Dispute wh^r. y^r. respectable Brother or I are Owners of Yatton You See The Law which Gave It me Once *may Give it Me Again and No Mistake*—who knows (in this uncertain Life) whatever Turns Up I can (Betwixt Ourselves) assure You There Is *Something In The Wind* For me w^h. dare not Say More Of at this Present. But Suposing You & I shall Hit it what Say You if I should Propose dividing The Estate betwixt Him & Me & *Settling All my Half on You* And as To the Title (w^h. at present I Am Next to) what Say You To your Brother and I Tossing up for it When It comes for I am Sorry to hear His Lordship is breaking, and I know *Who I shd. Like To see Lady Drelincourt*, oh what a hapiness Only To think Of, As They are dividing very soon (And they *Do Run It Uncommon Fine*, But Ministers

must Be Supported or The Country Will Go to the Dogs) Must Close Begging an Answer directed to Me Here, and Subscribe Myself,

"Hnd. and dear Madam,

"Yrs. Most Obediently,

"T. TITMOUSE.

"MISS AUBREY,
"Vivian Street."

"I hope, Kate, you have not been giving this gentleman encouragement!" quoth Delamere, when he had read the above. It formed a topic of pleasant merriment when they all met at dinner—a right cheerful party, consisting solely of the Aubreys and Lord and Lady De la Zouch, and Delamere. Mr. Aubrey had returned from town with important intelligence.

"Mr. Runnington is steadily and patiently unravelling," said he, as they sat in unrestrained converse after dinner, "one of the most monstrous tissues of fraud that was ever woven by man! We sometimes imagine that Mr. Gammon must have had in view the securing Yatton for himself! The firm of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, are completely overwhelmed with the consequences of their abominable conduct!—I understand they have terribly taken in the Jews—to the amount of at least seventy or eighty thousand pounds of hard cash; and one of them, it seems, on discovering that he has no security, very nearly succeeded in hanging himself the other day!"

"What's this I see in the paper about a Mr. Tag-rag?" inquired Lord De la Zouch:—and Mr. Aubrey told him the miserable condition to which Tag-rag had been reduced by the alleged chicanery of the firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap.

"Mr. Runnington seems to be managing matters with great vigour and skill," said his lordship.

"Admirably! admirably! I never in my life saw or heard of such complete success as attends every step he takes against the enemy; he is hourly pressing them nearer and nearer to the verge of the precipice, and cutting off all retreat. They would fight, but they have no funds! Look at the administration suit!" Mr. Aubrey then proceeded to mention two very important circumstances which had transpired since his former visit to town. First, an offer was understood to have come direct from Mr. Gammon, to abandon the defence to the ejectment, on condition of his receiving on behalf of Mr. Titmouse the sum of two thousand pounds; but Mr. Runnington had peremptorily refused to listen to any proposal of the kind, and the actions were, at that moment, in full progress, with every prospect of there being no real defence even attempted. The next piece of intelligence was, that Messrs. Screw and Son, the solicitors to the Vulture Insurance Company, had called on Messrs. Runnington, on learning that they were the solicitors of the party to whom letters of administration had been granted, and intimated that the directors, "taking all the circumstances of the case into their consideration," had determined to offer no further opposition to the payment of the policy on the life of the late Lady Stratton. Mr. Screw talked very finely about the high principle and good feeling which ever actuated that distinguished Company; but he did not tell Mr. Runnington what was the real cause of their abandoning their opposition, which was this—that before their "commission" to examine their sole witness, Dr. Podagra, had reached China, they had accidentally received authentic intelligence of his death; he having been killed for vaccinating the infant of one of the Chinese! Under these circumstances, Mr. Runnington agreed to the terms proposed on the part of the Company; viz., that the action be discontinued forthwith, each party pay their own costs, and the whole amount of the policy, minus the £2,000 which had been advanced to Lady Stratton, be paid to Mr. Aubrey within a month from the day of discontinuing the action. Though Kate very vehemently

protested against it, she was at length persuaded to allow her brother to act according to the manifest intentions of the venerable deceased; and he, in his turn, received a very gratifying assurance that she would have given him, under the special circumstances of the case, no anxiety respecting his bond for £2,000 given to Lady Stratton, even had the grant of administration to the debtor interposed no technical objection! Thus was Kate no longer a dowerless maiden; having at her absolute disposal a sum of thirteen thousand pounds, in addition to which, in the event of their being restored to the possession of Yatton, she would be in the receipt of the income left her as a charge upon the estate by her father; viz., five hundred a-year.

While the cheering sunshine of returning prosperity was thus beaming with daily increasing warmth and brightness upon the Aubreys, "and all the clouds that lower'd upon their house," were, "in the deep bosom of the ocean buried," the sun of that proud and weak old man, the Earl of Dreddlington, was indeed going down in darkness. The proceedings which have been laid at length before the reader, arising out of the extraordinary termination of the inquiry set on foot by the Ecclesiastical Court, and quickly ending in the adoption of measures for the immediate recovery of Yatton, had attracted far too much of public attention to admit of their being concealed from the Earl, comparatively secluded from the world as he was. But the frightful confirmation of his assertion concerning what had occurred between himself and Mr. Gammon, respecting Titmouse, appeared to make no commensurate impression upon a mind no longer capable of appreciating it. He had been seized by a partial paralysis shortly after the last interview between himself, Mr. Gammon, and the Duke of Tantallan; and it was evident that his reason was failing rapidly. And it was perhaps a merciful dispensation, for it appeared that the cup of his misery and mortification was not even yet full. That other monstrous fabric of absurdity and fraud, built upon public credulity,—the Gunpowder and Fresh Water Company, suddenly dropped to pieces, principally on account of its chief architect, Mr. Gammon, being unable to continue that attention and skill by which it had been kept so long in existence. It suddenly exploded, involving everybody concerned in it in ruin. The shareholders had fondly imagined that they could repose with confidence on the provision inserted in the prospectus, and in the deed of settlement—viz., that no one was to be liable beyond the amount of their shares actually subscribed for: alas! how dreadful the delusion, and how quickly was it dissipated! The houses of Lord Dreddlington, the Duke of Tantallan, and others, were besieged by importunate creditors; and at length a general meeting was called, at which resolutions were passed, strongly reflecting upon the Earl of Dreddlington and Mr. Gammon; and directing the solicitor concerned for the rest of the shareholders to file a bill against the Earl and Mr. Gammon, for the purpose of compelling them to pay all the debts incurred by the Company. More than this, it was threatened that unless satisfactory proposals were promptly received from, or on behalf of the Earl of Dreddlington, he would be proceeded against as a *trader* liable to the bankrupt-laws, and a docket forthwith struck against him! Of this crowning indignity impending over his head, the poor old peer was fortunately not conscious, being at the moment resident at Poppleton Hall, in a state not far removed from complete imbecility. The Duke of Tantallan was similarly threatened; and alarmed and enraged almost to a pitch of madness, resolved to take measures for completely exposing and punishing the individual to whose fraudulent plausibility and sophistries he justly attributed the calamity which had befallen him and the Earl of Dreddlington.

"Out of this nettle danger, I'll yet pluck the flower *safety*,"—said Mr. Gammon to himself, as he sat inside one of the coaches going to Brighton, towards

the close of the month of November, being on the morning after the explosion of the Gunpowder and Fresh Water Company. Inextricably involved as he appeared, yet he did not despair of retrieving himself, and defeating the vindictive measures taken against him. His chambers were besieged by applicants for admission—Titmouse among them, whose senseless pertinacity, overheard by Gammon as he sat within, while his laundress was being daily worried by Titmouse, several times inflamed him almost up to the point of darting out and splitting open the head of the intruder; old Mr. Quirk also sent daily letters, in a piteous strain, and called besides daily, begging to be reconciled to Gammon: but he sternly turned a deaf ear to all such applications. In order to escape this intolerable persecution, at all events for a while, and, in change of scene and air, seek to recruit his health and spirits, he had determined upon spending a week at Brighton; telling no one, however, except his old and faithful laundress, his destination; and instructing her to say that he was gone, she believed, into Suffolk, but would certainly return to town within a week. His pale and harassed features showed how much he required the repose and relief he sought for, but which he sought for in vain. He felt not a whit the better after a two days' stay, though the weather had suddenly cleared up, and the air become brisk and bracing. Whithersoever *he* went, he carried about him a thick gloom which no sunshine could penetrate, no breezes dissipate. He could find rest nowhere, neither at home nor abroad, neither alone nor in company, neither sleeping nor waking. His brow was clouded by a stern melancholy, his heart was bursting with a sense of defeat, shame, exposure, mortification; and with all his firmness of nerve, he could not contemplate the future but with a shudder of apprehension. In fact, he was in a state of intense nervous irritability and excitement from morning to night. On the evening of the third day after his arrival, the London paper contained a paragraph which excited him not a little; and which was to the effect that a named solicitor of eminence had been the day before appointed by the Lord Chancellor to a specified office; being no other, in truth, than that which Gammon knew his lordship had all along destined for *him*; one which he could have filled to admiration, which would have given him permanent *status* in society; the salary attached to it being, moreover, £1,800 a-year! Gammon laid down the paper, and a sense of desolation came into his soul. After a while his eye lit on another part of the paper—gracious Heavens!—there were three or four lines which instantly roused him almost into madness. It was an advertisement that *he* had "*absconded*," and offering a reward of £200 to any one who would give information by which he might be "*discovered and apprehended*!"

"*Absconded!*" he exclaimed aloud, starting up, and his eye flaming with fury—"accursed miscreants! I'll quickly undeceive them." Instantly unlocking his paper-case, he sat down and wrote off a letter to the editor of the newspaper, giving his full name and address; most indignantly denying his having attempted or dreamed of absconding; stating that he should be in London within forty-eight hours; and requiring an ample apology for the gross insult and libel which he had perpetrated, to be inserted in the next number of his paper. Then he wrote off to the solicitor, Mr. Winnington, who had conducted all the town proceedings in the cause of *Wigley v. Gammon*, alluding in terms of indignation and astonishment to the offensive advertisement, and assuring him that he should within forty-eight hours be found, as usual, at his chambers, and prepared to make an immediate and satisfactory arrangement in respect of the damages and costs which were now due from him. In a similar strain he wrote to Mr. Runnington (who had maintained throughout, personally, a cautious courtesy towards Mr. Gammon)—begging him to postpone signing judgment in the action of *Doe on the*

demise of Aubrey v. Roe, till the last day of term, as he had a new and final proposal to make, which might have the effect of saving great delay and expense. He added, that he had also a proposition to offer upon the subject of Lord De la Zouch's bond and Mr. Aubrey's promissory notes, and begged the favour of a line in answer, addressed to him at his chambers in Thavies' Inn, and which he might find on his arrival. To a similar effect, he also wrote to the solicitor who was working the docket which had been struck against Mr. Tag-rag; and also to the solicitor who was employed on behalf of the shareholders in the Gunpowder and Fresh Water Company:—in all of them reprobating in terms of the keenest indignation the unwarrantable and libellous use of his name which had been made, and making appointments for the individuals addressed to call at his chambers on the day after his arrival in town.

Having thus done all in his power to counteract the injurious effects which were calculated to arise from so very premature and cruel a measure as that which had been taken, in offering a reward for his apprehension as an absconded felon, he folded up, sealed, and directed the letters, and took them himself to the post-office, in time for that night's post; and very greatly excited he was, as may be easily believed. He did not touch the dinner which he found laid for him on his return, but sat on the sofa, absorbed in thought, for nearly an hour: when he rang the bell, ordered his clothes to be instantly got ready for travelling—his bill made out—and then he went and secured a place in that night's mail, which was starting for town at half-past eight o'clock. Greatly to the surprise of his laundress, he made his appearance at his chambers between six and seven o'clock in the morning, rousing her from bed. He had thus, it will be observed, reached town contemporaneously with his own letters; and as all the appointments which he had made, were for the day after that of his arrival, he had secured a twenty-four hours' freedom from interruption of any sort, and resolved to avail himself of it, by keeping within doors the whole of the time, his laundress denying him, as usual, to any one who might call. He asked her if she had seen or heard of the atrocious advertisement which had appeared in yesterday's paper. She replied that she had; and added, that no doubt to that circumstance were to be attributed the calls made yesterday from morning to night—an announcement which seemed to heighten the excitement under which Mr. Gammon was evidently labouring. As soon as his lamp had been lit, he opened his paper-case, and wrote the following letter:—

“*Thavies Inn, Wednesday Morning.*”

“DEAR HARTLEY,—As I have not missed an annual meeting of our little club for these ten years, I shall be found at my place to-night at nine to a moment: that is, by the way, if I shall be admitted, after the execrable advertisement concerning me which appeared in yesterday's papers, and the writer of which I will give cause, if I can discover him, to repent to the latest day he lives. I came up this morning suddenly, to refute, by my presence and by my acts, the villainous falsehoods about my absconding. *Entre nous*, I am somewhat puzzled just now, certainly—but never fear! I shall find a way out of the wood yet. Expect me at nine, to a minute.—Yours as ever,

“O. GAMMON.”

“HARRY HARTLEY, Esq.
“Kensington Square.”

This he sealed and directed; and requesting his laundress to put it into the office in time for the first post, without fail—he got into bed, and slept for a couple of hours: when he awoke somewhat refreshed, made his toilet as usual, and partook of a slight breakfast.

“*You* did not suppose I had absconded, Mrs. Brown, eh?” he inquired; with

a melancholy smile, as she removed his breakfast things. "No, sir; indeed I did not believe a word of it—you've always been a kind and just master to me, sir—and"—she raised her apron to her eyes, and sobbed. "And I hope long to continue so, Mrs. Brown. By the way, were not your wages due a day or two ago?" "Oh, yes! sir—but it does not signify, sir, the least; though on second thoughts—it does, sir; for my little niece is to be taken into the country—she's dying, I fear—and her mother's been out of work for—" "Here's a ten-pound note, Mrs. Brown," replied Mr. Gammon, taking one from his pocket-book—"pay yourself your wages; write me a receipt as usual, and keep the rest on account of the next quarter's wages, if it will assist you just now."

She took the bank-note with many expressions of thankfulness; and but for her tears, she might have noticed that there was something dead in the eye of her kind and tranquil master. On her retiring, he rose, and walked to and fro for a long time, with folded arms, wrapped in profound meditation—from which he was occasionally unpleasantly startled by hearing knocks at his door, and then his laundress assuring the visitors that Mr. Gammon was out of town, but would return on the morrow.

It was a cheerless November day, the snow fluttering lazily through the foggy air; but his room was made snug and cheerful enough, by the large fire which he kept up. Opening his desk, he sat down, about noon, and wrote a very long letter—in the course of which, however, he repeatedly laid down his pen—got up and walked to and fro, heaving deep sighs, and being occasionally exceedingly agitated. At length he concluded it, paused some time, and then folded it up, and sealed it. Then he spent at least two hours in going over all the papers in his desk and cabinet; a considerable number of them he burnt, and replaced and arranged the remainder carefully. Then again he walked to and fro. The cat, which had been several years an inmate of the chambers, attracted his attention, by rubbing against his legs. "Poor puss!" he exclaimed, stroking her fondly on the back; and, after a while, the glossy creature sidled away, as it were reluctantly, from his caressing hand, and lay comfortably coiled up on the hearth-rug, as before. Again he walked to and fro, absorbed in melancholy reflection for some time; from which he was roused, about five, by Mrs. Brown bringing in the spare dinner—which, having barely tasted, he soon dismissed, telling Mrs. Brown that he felt a strange shooting pain in his head, but doubted not his being well enough to keep his appointment at the club—as she knew had been his habit for years. He requested her to have his dressing-room ready by a quarter to eight, and a coach fetched by eight o'clock precisely; and as soon as she had withdrawn, he sat down and wrote the following letter to the oldest and most devoted personal friend he had in the world:—

"MY DEAR—. I entreat you, by our long unbroken friendship, to keep the enclosed letter by you for a fortnight; and then, with your own hand, and alone, deliver it to the individual to whom it is addressed. Burn this note to you the instant you shall have read it—and take care that no eye sees the enclosed but *hers*—or all my efforts to secure a *little* provision for her will be frustrated. In the corner of the top drawer of my cabinet will be found, folded up, a document referred to in the enclosed letter—in fact, *my will*—and which I wish *you*, as an old friend, to take the very earliest opportunity of discovering, *accidentally*. You will find the *date* all correct, and *safe*. Call here to-morrow—at any hour you please—and say that you have called to see me, *according to my appointment*. Bear this in mind, by the value you set upon my friendship. Whatever you may then see or hear, be firm and prudent.

—O. G.

"Wednesday."

In this letter he enclosed the long letter already spoken of, and having sealed and directed the whole with elaborate distinctness, he threw his cloak round him, and went with his packet to the post-office, and with his own hand, after an instant's hesitation, dropped it into the box, and returned to his chambers.

Then he took another sheet of paper, and wrote thus :—

"DEAR VIPER,— I doubt whether, after all, there will be a dissolution ; but, at any rate, I will perform my promise, and be ready with what you wish for Sunday week.—Yours ever,

O. G.

"P.S.—I shall call on you on Saturday."

This he folded up and directed, and proceeded to commence the following :—

"Thavies' Inn, Wednesday.

"DEAR SIR,—I have finally determined to make every sacrifice in order to extricate myself, with honour, from my present embarrassments. You will, therefore, as soon as you get this, please to sell out all my—" here he laid down his pen ; and Mrs. Brown presently announcing that everything was ready in his dressing-room, he thanked her, and proceeded to shave and dress. He was not more than a quarter of an hour over his toilet. He had put on his usual evening dress—his blue body-coat, black trousers, a plain shirt and black stock, and a white waistcoat—scarcely whiter, however, than the face of him that wore it.

"I am going for the coach now, sir," said Mrs. Brown, knocking at the door. "If you please," he replied, briskly and cheerfully—and the instant that he had heard her close the outer door after her, he opened the secret spring drawer in his desk, and took out a very small glass phial, with a glass stopper, over which was tied some bladder, to preserve its contents from the air. His face was ghastly pale ; his knees trembled ; his hands were cold and damp as those of the dead. He took a strong peppermint lozenge from the mantelpiece, and chewed it, while he removed the stopper from the bottle, which contained about half a drachm of the most subtle and potent poison which has been discovered by man—one extinguishing life almost instantaneously, and leaving no trace of its presence except a slight odour, which he had taken the precaution of masking and overpowering with that of the peppermint. He returned to get his hat, which was in his dressing-room ; he put it on—and in glancing at the glass, scarcely recognised the ghastly image it reflected. His object was, to complete the deception he intended practising on the Insurance Company, with whom he had effected a policy on his life for £2,000—and also to deceive everybody into the notion of his having died suddenly, but naturally. Having stirred up the large red fire, and made a kind of hollow in it, he took out the stopper, and dropped it, with the bladder, into the fire ; took his pen in his right hand, with a fresh dip of ink in it ; kneeled down on the fender ; uttered aloud the word "*Emma* ;" poured the whole of the deadly contents into his mouth, and succeeded in dropping the phial into the very heart of the fire—falling down the next instant on the hearthrug, oblivious, insensible—*dead*. However it might have been, that the instant after he had done this direful deed, he would have *given the whole universe*, had it been his, to have undone what he had done—he had succeeded, *for the present*, in effecting his object.

Poor Mrs. Brown's terror, on discovering her master stretched senseless on the floor—his hat pushed partly down over his eyes in the act of falling—may be imagined. Medical assistance was called in, but only to announce that "the vital spark had fled." It was clearly either apoplexy, said the intelligent medical man, or an organic disease of the heart. Of this opinion were the coroner and

his jury, without hesitation. The deceased had evidently been seized while in the very act of writing to some broker. [Gammon had no more "*stock*" of any sort, for all he had written that letter, than the cat which had witnessed, and been for a moment disturbed by, his death.] Mr. Hartley came, and produced the letter he had received, and spoke of the disappointment they had all felt on account of Mr. Gammon's non-arrival: the other letters—the appointments which he had made for the morrow—the evidence which he had taken care to enable his laundress to give—all these things were decisive—it was really "scarcely a case requiring an inquest;" but as they had been called, they returned a verdict of "Died by the Visitation of God." He was buried a few days afterwards in the adjoining churchyard (St. Andrew's), where he lies mouldering away quietly enough, certainly; but whether (in the language of the solemn and sublime burial-service which his sorrowful friend had procured to be read over his remains) "*in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ,*" is another, and a fearful question.

His "friend" was faithful and discreet, obeying his injunctions to the letter. The "individual," alluded to in Mr. Gammon's note to him, was a beautiful girl whom Mr. Gammon had seduced under a solemn promise of marriage; who was passionately attached to him; whose name he had uttered when on the eve of death; and to whom he had, some six months before, bequeathed the amount of the policy—his will being witnessed by Mary Brown, his housekeeper. Though his creditors were, of course, entitled to every farthing of the £2,000, out of which he had so artfully swindled the Insurance Company, they generously allowed her, in consideration of her peculiar and melancholy situation, to receive the sum of £1,000!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WITH its architect, fell that surprising fabric of fraud and wrong, the rise and fall of which are commemorated in this history. Though Mr. Runnington's vigilance and ability had set matters into such a train, that, had Mr. Gammon lived to continue his most skilful opposition, he could not have delayed for any considerable length of time Mr. Aubrey's restoration to Yatton, yet the sudden and most unexpected death of Mr. Gammon greatly accelerated that event. Notwithstanding the verdict of the coroner's inquest, both Mr. Aubrey and Mr. Runnington—and in fact very many others—strongly suspected the true state of the case; viz., that in the desperation of defeat and dreaded exposure, he had destroyed himself.

Towards the close of the Term, Mr. Runnington went to the proper office of the Court of King's Bench, in order to ascertain whether Mr. Titmouse had taken the requisite steps towards defending the actions of ejectment commenced by Mr. Aubrey, and found that, though the prescribed period had elapsed, he had not; in other words, that he had "suffered judgment by default." Delighted, though not much surprised by this discovery, Mr. Runnington resolved at once to follow up his victory. 'Twas only a short and simple process that was requisite to effect such great results. He took a single sheet of draft paper, on which he wrote some half dozen lines called an "*Incipitur*," as if he were going to copy out the "declaration" in ejectment, but stopped short about the fifth line. This sheet of paper, together with another containing his "Rule for Judgment" he took to the Master's office, in order that that functionary might "SIGN JUDGMENT"—which he did, by simply writing in the margin of what Mr. Runnington had written, the words "*Judgment signed, 23rd November, 18—*," and impressing above it the seal of the court; and behold, at that instant, the

property in the whole of the Yatton estates had become vested in Mr. Aubrey again!

The next step requisite was to secure the *possession* of the property; for which purpose Mr. Runnington immediately procured a *writ of possession* (i.e., a writ requiring the sheriff of Yorkshire to put Mr. Aubrey into actual possession), to be engrossed on a slip of parchment. This he got sealed; and then obtained a *warrant* from the sheriff to his officers, to execute the writ. Now the sheriff might, had it been necessary, have roused—nay, was bound to do so—the whole *posse comitatus*, in order to compel submission to his authority; and I can assure the reader that the whole *posse comitatus* would have answered his summons on that occasion very eagerly—but it was needless. Who was there to resist him at Yatton? The transference of the possession became under these circumstances a very slight matter-of-fact affair. The under sheriff of Yorkshire drove up in his gig to the Hall, where he found Mr. Parkinson waiting his arrival—(no breaking open of doors was necessary!)—and in a hurried word or two informed Mr. Parkinson that he then delivered the possession to him for and on account of Charles Aubrey, esquire, his heirs, and assigns, for ever—and after remarking, “what a fine estate it was, and in very good order, *considering*,” he drove off. I may add, that to save the useless expense of some hundred writs of possession, “*attornments*” were taken from all the tenants—i.e., written acknowledgments that they held under Charles Aubrey, esquire, as their sole, true, and proper landlord. This done, that gentleman was reinstated in all that he had been dispossessed of, as absolutely, and to all intents and purposes, as if the events of the last three years had been but a *dream*—as if such persons as Tittlebat Titmouse, and Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, had never existed; and Mr. Griffiths the steward, and Mr. Parkinson, by way of commemorating the event, opened a couple of bottles of port wine, which, with the efficient assistance of Mr. Waters and Mr. Dickons, the upper and under bailiffs, Tonson the game-keeper, and Pumpkin the gardener, were very quickly emptied amidst shouts—in which ’tis hoped the good-natured reader will join—of “Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!—Hip, hip, hip, *hurrah!*—Hip, hip, *hurrah!* HURRAH!” Then phlegmatic Mr. Dickons stepped out into the courtyard, and, by way of further relieving his excited feelings, flung his heavy ashens walking-stick up a surprised height into the air; and when he had caught it on its descent, as he grasped it in his huge horny hand in silence, he shook it above his head with the feeling that he could have smashed a million of Titmice in a minute, if he could have got among them. Then he thought of Mrs. Aubrey and Kate, and up went the stick again, higher even than before—by which time they had all come out into the yard, and shouted again, and again, and again, till their voices rung, and echoed in the air, and excited an uproar in the rookery behind them.

While this result of his triumphant exertions was being thus celebrated at Yatton, Mr. Runnington was exerting himself to the utmost in London, in the extrication of Mr. Aubrey from all his pecuniary embarrassments—the chief of which were, his two promissory notes for £5,000 each, with interest, and the actions depending upon them—the joint bond of himself and Lord De la Zouch for £10,000 and interest—and the action pending for the balance of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap’s bill—viz. £1,416 14s. 6d. Undoubtedly these matters occasioned him a vast deal of trouble and anxiety: but his experienced tact, and vigilance, and determination, overcame all obstacles. The balance of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap’s abominable bill of costs, melted away and totally disappeared in the heat of the taxing office; and with the aid of certain summary applications, both to the Lord Chancellor and to the common law judges, and after a good deal of diplomacy, Mr. Runnington succeeded in getting into his hands, cancelled, the above-mentioned two notes, on payment to Mr. Spitfire for and on account of Mr. Titmouse, of £250 (of

which Mr. Titmouse by the way got £15, the remainder being claimed by Spitfire in respect of costs), and the bond for ten thousand pounds, which was found in the strong box of the late Mr. Gammon, was delivered up by Messrs. Quirk and Snap, on certain hints being given them by Mr. Runnington of the serious consequences of refusal. Not satisfied with this, Mr. Runnington obtained from Mr. Titmouse a formal and solemn release to Mr. Aubrey of all claims, debts, damages, and demands whatsoever, both at law and in equity. But how stood the matter of Mr. Titmouse's liabilities to Mr. Aubrey, in respect of the mesne profits during the last two years and more? Why, he owed Mr. Aubrey a sum of some twenty-five thousand pounds—not one farthing of which would ever see its way into the pockets of him who had been so cruelly defrauded of it! The greatest trouble of Mr. Runnington, however, was the extorting the title-deeds from the three Jews, Mordecai Gripe, Israel Fang, and Mephibosheth Maharshalah-hash-baz. Unhappy wretches! they writhed and gasped as though their very hearts were being torn out; but they had no help for it, as their own attorneys and solicitors told them; since the right of Mr. Aubrey to his title-deeds was as clear and indisputable as his right to the estates, and their resistance of his claim would only entail on them additional, very serious, and fruitless expense. They grinned, chattered, stuttered, and stamped about in impotent but horrible fury; and, if they could, would have torn Mr. Gammon out of his grave, and placed his body, and those of Messrs. Quirk and Snap, over a slow fire! These gentlemen were not, however, the only persons who had been astounded, dismayed, and defeated, by Mr. Gammon's *leap into the dark*.

To say nothing of Mr. Wigley, who might now whistle for his debt and costs, and many other persons who had rested all their hopes upon Mr. Gammon's powers, and his responsibility, his sudden death precipitated total ruin upon his weak aristocratical dupe and victim, the poor old Earl Dreddlington. In addition to the formidable movement against his lordship and Mr. Gammon in the Court of Chancery, on the part of their co-shareholders and adventurers, for the purpose of procuring them to be declared alone liable for all the debts contracted by the Gunpowder and Fresh Water Company, the creditors, rendered impatient and desperate by the sudden death of Mr. Gammon, began to attempt daily to harass the unfortunate Earl with their personal importunity for payment of their demands, and that at his residence in Grosvenor Square and at Poppleton Hall. At the former they were, of course, uniformly encountered by the answer that his lordship was both ill and out of town. Upon that, down to his lordship's nearest country residence—viz., Poppleton—went the chief of his infuriate creditors, not believing the answer they had received at his lordship's town-house; but at Poppleton, the Earl was of course denied to them, and with a peremptoriness of manner, which, excited as they were, they converted into insolence and defiance, and a determined denial to his lordship's creditors. Upon this, they took the opinion of counsel upon three points. *First*, whether a peer of the realm could be made a bankrupt if he became a trader; *Secondly*, whether the Earl of Dreddlington's active connection with the Gunpowder and Fresh Water Company constituted him a trader within the meaning of the bankrupt laws; and *Lastly*, whether the facts stated amounted to an act of bankruptcy. To this it was answered—*First*, that a peer could clearly be made a bankrupt if he traded, as an Earl of Suffolk had been declared a bankrupt by reason of an act of bankruptcy committed by him in buying and selling of wines (per Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, in *ex parte* Meymot, 1 Atkyn's Reports, p. 201). *Secondly*, that the Gunpowder and Fresh Water Company was one of such a nature as constituted its members "traders" within the meaning of the bankrupt laws. *Thirdly*, that the facts stated showed the committing of an act of bankruptcy, on the part of the Earl of Dreddlington, by "*beginning to keep*

his house." Upon this, the more eager and reckless of his lordship's creditors instantly struck a docket against him ; and thereupon, down came the messenger of the court to take possession of his lordship's houses and effects, both at Grosvenor Square, Poppleton Hall, and in Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland—that is as to the last four, if he could discover them. At Poppleton he was sternly refused an entrance ; on which he produced his authority, and protested that, if further denied, he would immediately proceed to effect an entrance by main force, come what might, and those within must take the consequences. After a brief affrighted pause, he was admitted—and immediately declared himself to be in possession, under the bankruptcy, and by the authority of the Lord Chancellor, of the premises, and everything upon them ; at the same time announcing to the dismayed inmates, that he would do nothing to give the slightest annoyance, or occasion apprehensions to the noble bankrupt. This very unusual occurrence found its way into the newspapers of the next day, which brought, accidentally, under the notice of Mr. Aubrey the lamentable condition of his haughty yet fallen kinsman. He hurried off in alarm and agitation to Mr. Runnington, and requested him immediately to put himself into communication with the Earl's solicitor, whoever he might be, with a view to saving him, if possible, from the indignity and ruin with which he was threatened ; and then drove down himself to Poppleton, to tender his personal services in any way that might appear most desirable. He was shocked indeed at finding the house, and everything in it, in formal possession of the bankruptcy messenger ; but much more so, on learning the deplorable condition of the Earl personally. It appeared that he had most unfortunately witnessed, during a brief interval, and while he was being assisted out of his carriage on his return from an airing, the arrival of the messenger, and his altercation with the servants at the door : and that, on being made acquainted with the true nature of the proceeding, he staggered back into the arms of Miss Macspleuchan, and was soon afterwards seized with another fit of paralysis. All this Mr. Aubrey, on his arrival, learned from Miss Macspleuchan—whom he knew only by name—and who communicated the dismal tidings in an agony of grief and agitation. The physician and apothecary were with the Earl when Mr. Aubrey arrived ; and, finding that he could render no personal service to his suffering kinsman, he returned to town, assuring Miss Macspleuchan that she would see him again on the morrow—and that he would, in the meanwhile, do everything in his power, in town, to avert from the Earl the immediate effects of his fearful imprudence. Faithful to his promise, he instructed Mr. Runnington to do everything in reason to rescue the Earl, and, in his person, the honour of the family, from the impending misfortune. 'Twas, however, all in vain. Two days afterwards, and before Mr. Runnington had acted upon the instructions given to him by Mr. Aubrey, the latter received intelligence by express from Poppleton, that the Earl was dying ; that he was conscious of his rapidly approaching end ; and was understood to have expressed a wish to see Mr. Aubrey before he died. When he arrived, he was at once ushered into the Earl's bedchamber, and found the Duke of Tantallan sitting on one side of the bed and Miss Macspleuchan on the other ; she was weeping in silence, and her left hand was grasped between the thin white hands of the Earl, whose face was turned towards her. His snow-white hair and wasted features, and the expression of mingled misery, feebleness, and affection that were in his eyes, fixed heavily upon Miss Macspleuchan, filled Mr. Aubrey with deep emotion. The Earl seemed a mere skeleton ! Shortly after Mr. Aubrey had entered the room, Miss Macspleuchan leaned down to the Earl's ear, and, in a whisper, informed him of Mr. Aubrey's arrival. He did not seem at first to have heard, or at least comprehended, what she had said ; but, a few moments afterwards, opened his eyes a little wider than they had been before, and his lips quivered as if with an effort at speaking.

Then he very feebly extended both his thin arms towards Miss Macspleuchan who was still leaning over him, and placed them tremblingly round her neck, from which, however, in a moment or two, they suddenly fell; the lower jaw also fell; the poor Earl was dead—and Miss Macspleuchan, with a faint sigh, sunk back in a swoon into the arms of the nurse who stood beside her, and who, assisted by a female attendant, immediately removed her from the room. The Duke of Tantallan remained sitting where he was, but with his face averted, and his right hand clasping one of the hands of his deceased kinsman: and Mr. Aubrey continued standing at the foot of the bed, his eyes covered by his hand. Neither of them spoke for some time. At length the Duke, very deeply affected, slowly rose, and quitted the chamber in silence, followed by Mr. Aubrey, as those entered who were to commence the last sad offices for the dead.

The Duke undertook all the arrangements for the funeral; and after much melancholy conversation with his grace concerning the shocking state in which the Earl had left his affairs, and having offered to provide, should it be necessary, for Miss Macspleuchan, Mr. Aubrey took his departure.

"Is the carriage at the door?" he inquired of the servant who stood in the hall expecting his approach.

"Yes, my lord," he replied; and his words caused *Lord Drelincourt* almost to start back a step or two; and he changed colour. Then he entered his carriage, and continued in a very melancholy and subdued mood during the whole of the drive up to town. He had, indeed, now become *Lord Drelincourt*—an event thus announced the next morning to the great world, in the columns of the obsequious *Aurora*.

"Yesterday, at his residence, Poppleton Hall, Hertfordshire, in his seventieth year, died the Right Hon. the Earl of Dreddlington, G.C.B., etc., etc. His lordship was Fifth Earl of Dreddlington, and Twentieth Baron Drelincourt. The Earldom (created in 1667) is now extinct; but his lordship is succeeded in the ancient barony of Drelincourt (created by writ, 12th Henry II.) by Charles Aubrey, Esq., of Yatton, in Yorkshire, the representative of the younger branch of the family, who is now 21st Lord Drelincourt, and has just succeeded in recovering back the whole of the Yatton property, which about two years ago, it may be remembered, was recovered in a very extraordinary manner (which is now, we believe, the subject of judicial inquiry) by Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq., at present M.P. for Yatton. His lordship (who is now in his thirty-sixth year) took a double first-class at Oxford, and sat for several years as member for Yatton. He married, in 18—, Agnes, sole daughter and heiress of the late Colonel St. Clair, who fell in the Peninsular war, and has issue by her ladyship two children, Charles, born in 18—, and Agnes, born in 18—. His lordship has no brothers, and only one sister, Miss Catharine Aubrey, who is understood to be affianced to the Hon. Mr. Delamere, the only son and heir of the Right Hon. Lord De la Zouch. The late Earl was a decided Whig; but the present Lord Drelincourt is as staunch a Tory."

Till Yatton could be got ready for their reception, they had taken, as a temporary residence, a furnished house in Dover Street, only a few doors distance from that of Lord De la Zouch; and on his arrival from Poppleton Hall, Lord Drelincourt found Lady Drelincourt and his sister had not yet returned from their afternoon's drive. When they drew up to the door, however, the closed shutters and drawn blinds apprized them of the melancholy event which had taken place. On hearing that Lord Drelincourt was alone in the drawing-room, where he had been for upwards of an hour, they rushed upstairs, and in a few moments Lord and Lady Drelincourt had fondly embraced each other, and Miss Aubrey, full of eager affection, had embraced both of them; and then, quitting the room, quickly returned with Charles and Agnes, now—little unconscious creatures!—the Honourable Charles and the Honourable

Agnes Aubrey. Surely it was not to be expected that any of them should entertain very poignant feelings of sorrow for the death of an individual who had ever totally estranged himself from them, and treated every member of their family with the most offensive and presumptuous insolence—the bitterest contempt; who, when he knew that they were destitute and all but perishing had kept cruelly aloft for ever, without once extending towards them a helping hand. Still, they had regarded the afflicting circumstances which attended, and hastened, their lofty kinsman's death, with sincere commiseration for one so weak and misguided, and whose pride had had, indeed, so signal and fearful a fall.

This event, of course, threw them again, for a time, into mourning. Lord Drelincourt attended the funeral of the late Earl, which took place at Poppleton, and was plain and private; and a few days afterwards, yearning to see Yatton once again, and anxious also to give his personal directions concerning very many matters which required them, he accepted an offer of a seat in the carriage of Lord De la Zouch, who was going down for a few days to Fotheringham on business of importance. Lord Drelincourt agreed to take up his abode at Fotheringham during his brief stay in Yorkshire, and to give no one at Yatton a previous intimation of his intention to pay a visit to them—purposing, the morning after his arrival at Fotheringham, to ride over quietly, alone and unexpectedly.

'Twas about four o'clock in the afternoon of a frosty day in the early part of December; and Dr. Tatham was sitting alone in his plainly-furnished and old-fashioned little study, beside the table on which Betty, his old housekeeper, had just laid his scanty show of tea-things—the small, quaintly-figured round silver tea-pot having been the precious gift, more than twenty years before, of old Madam Aubrey. On his knee lay open a well-worn parchment-covered Elzevir copy of *Thomas à Kempis*, a constant companion of the Doctor's, which he had laid down a few moments before, in a fit of musing—and he was gazing in the direction of the old yew-tree, a portion of which, with a grey crumbling corner of his church, at only some two dozen yards' distance, was visible through the window. On one side of his book-shelves hung his surplice on one peg, and on another his gown; and on the other his rusty shovel-hat and walking-stick. Over the mantelpiece were suspended two small black profile likenesses of old Squire Aubrey, and Madam Aubrey, which they had themselves presented to the Doctor nearly thirty years before. Though it was very cold, there was but a handful of fire in the little grate; and this, together with the modicum of coarse brown sugar in the sugar-basin, and about two tea-spoonfuls of tea, which he had just before measured out of his little tea-caddy, into his tea-cup, in order to be ready to put it into his tea-pot, when Betty should have brought in the kettle—and four thin slices of scantily buttered brown bread—all this, I say, seemed touching evidence of the straitened circumstances in which the poor Doctor was placed. His clothes, too, very clean, very threadbare, and of a very rusty hue—down even to his gaiters—suggested the same reflection to the beholder. The five pounds which he had scraped together for purchasing a new suit, Mr. Titmouse, it will be remembered, had succeeded in cheating him out of. His hair was of a silvery white; and though he was evidently a little cast down in spirits, the expression of his countenance was as full of benevolence and piety as ever. He was, moreover, considerably thinner than when he was last presented to the reader; and well he might be, for he had since undergone great privation and anxiety. He—*he*, peaceful unoffending old soul!—had long been followed with pertinacious bitterness and persecution by two new inhabitants of the village; viz., the Rev. Smirk Mudflint and Mr. Bloodsuck, junior. The former had obtained a lease from Mr. Titmouse of the little building which had formerly been

Miss Aubrey's school, and had turned it into a Unitarian chapel—himself and family residing in part of the building. He preached every Sunday at Dr. Tatham, turning his person, his habits, his office, and his creed in to bitter ridicule; and repeatedly challenging him, from his pulpit, to open discussion of the points in difference between them! By means of his "moral" discourses every Sunday morning, and his "political" discourses every Sunday evening—and which he used all his power to render palatable to those who heard him—he was undoubtedly seducing away many of the parishioners from the parish church; a matter which began visibly to prey upon the Doctor's spirits. Then Mr. Bloodsuck, too, was carrying on the campaign briskly against the parson—against whom he had got a couple of actions pending at the suit of parishioners in respect of his right to certain tithes which had never before been questioned by any one. Only that very day the impudent jackanapes—for that, I am sure, you would have pronounced Mr. Barnabas Bloodsuck at first sight—had sent a very offensive letter to the Doctor, which had been designed by its writer to have the effect of drawing the Doctor into a sudden compromise; whereas the Doctor, with a just sense and spirit, had resolved never in any way to suffer his rights, and those of his successors, to be infringed. Many and many a weary walk to Mr. Parkinson's office at Grilston had these persecuting proceedings of Bloodsuck's cost the Doctor, and also considerable and unavoidable expense, which, had he been in any other hands than those of good Mr. Parkinson, must by this time have involved the Doctor in utter ruin, and broken his heart. Still generous according to his means, the good soul had, on his last visit to Grilston, purchased and brought home with him a couple of bottles of port wine, which he intended to take on Christmas Day to a poor brother parson in an adjoining parish, whose wife had been bedridden for ten years. All these matters might well occasion Dr. Tatham anxiety, and frequent fits of despondency, such as that under which he was suffering, when he heard a gentle tapping at his door, while sitting in his study as I have described him. "Come in, Betty," quoth the Doctor, in his usual kind and quiet way, supposing it to be his old housekeeper with his tea-kettle; for she had gone with it a few minutes before across the yard to the well, leaving the front door ajar till her return. He sat with his back towards it; and finding, after a pause, that no one entered or spoke, he turned round his chair to see the reason why, and beheld a man standing there, dressed in deep mourning, and gazing at him with an expression of infinite tenderness and benignity. The Doctor was a little of a believer in the reality of spiritual appearances; and, taken quite off his guard, jumped out of his chair, and stared for a second or two in mute amazement, if not even apprehension, at the figure standing silently in the doorway.

"Why! Bless—bless my soul—can it be?"—he stammered, and the next instant perceived that it was indeed, as I may say, *the desire of his eyes*—Mr. Aubrey, now become, as the Doctor had a few days before heard from Mr. Parkinson, Lord Drelincourt.

"Oh my dear, old, revered friend! Do I see you once again?" he exclaimed in a tremulous voice, as he stepped hastily up to the Doctor, with his arms extended, and, grasping the hand of the Doctor with vehement pressure, they both gazed at each other for some moments in silence, and with tears in their eyes; Lord Drelincourt's soul touched within him by the evident alteration which had taken place in Dr. Tatham's appearance.

"And is it indeed true, my dear friend?" at length faltered the Doctor, still gazing fondly at Lord Drelincourt,

"It *is* your old friend, Charles Aubrey! dearest Doctor! God bless you, my revered friend and instructor of my youth!" said Lord Drelincourt, with a full heart and a quivering lip; "I am come, you see, once more to Yatton, and

first of all to you ; and in your presence to acknowledge the goodness of God, for He has been very good to me ! ”

“ The Lord God of thy fathers bless thee ! ” exclaimed Dr. Tatham solemnly ; and Lord Drelincourt reverently received the benison. A few moments afterwards he sat down, opposite the Doctor, in the only spare chair there was in the room, and they were instantly engaged in eager and affectionate converse.

“ Why, Mr. Aubrey,” quoth the Doctor with a smile, but also with a slight embarrassment, “ I had forgotten — Lord Drelincourt, how strangely it sounds ! ”

“ Yes, it is true, such is now my name ; but, believe me, I am not yet reconciled to it, especially, dearest Doctor, in your presence ! Shall I ever be as happy as Lord Drelincourt as I have been as Charles Aubrey ? ” “ Ay, ay, dear friend, to be sure you will ! ’Tis in the course of God’s providence that you are raised to distinction, as well as restored to your own ! Long may you live to enjoy both ! and I hope at Yatton,” he added earnestly. “ Oh, can you doubt it, dearest Doctor ? My heart is only now recovering the wounds it received in being torn from this dear spot.” “ And Mrs. Au—I mean Lady Drelincourt. God Almighty bless her ! and Kate—sweet, dear Kate ! Well ! *She* has not changed her name yet, I suppose ? ” “ Not *yet*,” replied Lord Drelincourt with a cheerful smile. “ And do you mean to say that you are all coming to old Yatton again ? ”

“ Coming to Yatton again ? ’Tis a little paradise to all of us ! Here we wish to live ; and when we follow those who have gone before us, *there* we wish to rest ! ” said Lord Drelincourt solemnly, and he pointed towards the churchyard, with a look that suddenly filled the Doctor’s eyes with tears, for it brought full before them the funeral of Mrs. Aubrey.

“ I have two letters for you,” said Lord Drelincourt after a pause, taking out his pocket-book, “ from my wife and sister, who charged me to give them into your own hands with their fervent love ; ” and he gave two letters into the Doctor’s hands, which trembled with emotion as he received them. “ I shall read them by-and-by, when I am alone,” said he, as, gazing fondly at the superscriptions he placed the two letters on the mantelpiece.

“ Come in ! Come in ! ” quoth the Doctor quickly, hearing a knocking at the door—“ That’s Betty. You have not forgotten old Betty, have you ? ” said he to Lord Drelincourt, as the good old woman opened the door in a flustered manner, with the kettle in her hands, and dropped an awful curtsy on seeing Lord Drelincourt, whom she instantly recognized.

“ Well, Betty,” said he with infinite cordiality, “ I am glad to see you again, and to hear that you are well ! ” “ Yes, sir !—if you please, sir !—thank you, sir ! ”—stammered Betty, curtsying repeatedly, and standing, with the kettle in her hand, as if she did not intend to come in with it.

“ That will do, Betty,” quoth the Doctor and looked so delighted at Lord Drelincourt’s good-natured greeting of his faithful old servant ; “ bring it in ! And Thomas is quite well, too,” he added, turning to Lord Drelincourt—Thomas being Betty’s husband—and both of whom had lived with the Doctor for some eighteen or twenty years—Thomas’s business being to look after the Doctor’s nag while he kept one, and now to do odd jobs about the little garden and paddock. After one or two kind inquiries about him, “ I must join you, Doctor —if you please,” said Lord Drelincourt, as Betty put the kettle on the fire ; “ you’ll give me a cup of tea—”

“ A cup of tea ? Ay, to be sure ! Betty ! here,” said he, beckoning her to him, and whispering to her to bring out the best tea-things, and to run out into the village for a couple of tea-cakes, and a little more tea, and some eggs and butter, and half a pound of lump sugar—for the Doctor was bent upon doing

the thing splendidly on so great an occasion ; but Lord Drelincourt, who overheard him, and who had asked to take tea with him only that he might not delay the Doctor's doing so—(for Lord Drelincourt had not yet dined)—interposed, declaring that if anything of the sort were done he would leave immediately ; adding, that he expected his horses at the door every moment, and also that Lord De la Zouch (who had come over with him from Fotheringham, and was at that moment at the Hall) would presently call to join him on his way home. This secured Lord Drelincourt's wishes—and you might, within a few minutes' time, have seen him partaking of the Doctor's humble beverage, while they continued in eager and earnest conversation. Lord Drelincourt had that morning had a very long conversation with Mr. Parkinson, from whom he had learned the life of persecution which the poor Doctor had led for the last two years—and learned it, too, with the keenest indignation. The Doctor himself softened down matters a good deal in the account which he gave Lord Drelincourt—but his lordship saw at once that the case had not been in the least overstated by Mr. Parkinson ; and, without intimating anything of his intentions to the Doctor, resolved upon forthwith taking certain steps, which, had *they* known them, would have made two persons in the village shake in their shoes.

"What's that, Doctor?" suddenly inquired Lord Drelincourt, hearing a noise as of shouting outside. Now the fact was, that the appearance of Lord Drelincourt and Lord De la Zouch, and their two grooms, as they galloped down the village on their way to the Hall, had created a pretty sensation in the village ; for Lord Drelincourt, rapidly as he rode in, was soon recognised by those who were about, and the news spread like wildfire that the lord "Squire" had come back, and was then at Yatton—a fact which seemed to be anything but gratifying to Messrs. Bloodsuck and Mudflint, who were talking together, at the moment when Lord Drelincourt asked the question of Dr. Tatham, at the door of Mr. Mudflint, whose face seemed to have got several degrees sallow within a quarter of an hour, while Mr. Bloodsuck looked quite white. There was a continually increasing crowd about the front of the Vicarage ; and as they got more and more assured of the fact that Lord Drelincourt was at that moment in the Vicarage, they began to shout "hurrah !" So—

"What's that?" inquired Lord Drelincourt.

"Ah !—I know !" cried the Doctor, with not a little excitement ; "they've found you out, bless them !—hark !—I have not heard such a thing I don't know how long—I wonder they don't set the bells a-ringing !—Why, bless me ! there's a couple of hundred people before the door !" exclaimed he, after stepping into the front room, and reconnoitred through the window. Though the gloom of evening was rapidly deepening, Lord Drelincourt also perceived the great number of people that had collected together, and his eye having caught the approaching figure of Lord De la Zouch, for whom, and the grooms, the crowd made way, he prepared to leave. Lord De la Zouch dismounted, and, entering the vicarage, shook hands with the utmost cordiality with the little Doctor, whom he invited to dine and sleep at Fotheringham on the morrow, promising to send the carriage for him. The little Doctor scarce knew whether he stood on his head or his heels, in the excitement of the moment ; and when he and Lord Drelincourt appeared at the door, and a great shout burst from those present, it was with great difficulty that he could resist his inclination to join in it. It was growing late, however, and they had a long ride before them ; so Lord Drelincourt, having stood for some moments bare-headed and bowing to all around, and shaking hands with those who pressed nearest, following the example of Lord De la Zouch, mounted his horse, and waving his hand affectionately to Dr. Tatham, rode off amidst the renewed cheers of the crowd. From that moment Dr. Tatham had regained all his former ascendancy at Yatton !

As the two peers sat together over their wine that evening, the fate of the Rev. Mr. Mudflint, and Barnabas Bloodsuck, junior, "gentleman, etc," was sealed. The more that they talked together about the bitter insults and persecutions which those worthies had so long inflicted upon Dr. Tatham, the higher rose their indignation, the sterner their determination to punish and remove his enemies. The next morning Lord De la Zouch wrote up to town, directing instructions to be given to Mr. Winnington, who had conducted the proceedings in the actions of *Wigley v. Mudflint*, and *Wigley v. Bloodsuck*, to issue execution forthwith. Lord Drelincourt also did his part. Almost every house in the village was his property, and he instructed Mr. Parkinson immediately to take steps towards summarily ejecting the two aforesaid worthies from the premises they were respectively occupying—convinced that by so doing he was removing two principal sources of mischief from the village and neighbourhood; for they were the founders and most active members of a sort of spouting-club for radical and infidel speechifying, and promoting the interests of the Liberal cause at Yatton, and which club their presence and influence alone kept together.

Early the next morning Lord Drelincourt returned to the Hall, having appointed several persons to meet him there, on business principally relating to the restoration of the Hall to its former state, as far as practicable; at all events, to render it fit for the reception of the family within as short a period as possible. According to an arrangement he had made before quitting town, he found, on reaching the Hall, a gentleman from London, of great taste and experience, to whose hands was to be entrusted the entire superintendence of the contemplated reparations and restorations, both internal and external, regard being had to the antique and peculiar character of the mansion—it being his lordship's anxious wish that Lady Drelincourt and Miss Aubrey, on their return, should see it, as nearly as was practicable, in the condition in which they had left it. Fortunately the little Vandal who had just been expelled from it, had done little or no permanent or substantial injury. There was the same great irregular mass of old brickwork, with its huge stacks of chimneys, just as they had ever known it, only requiring a little pointing. That fine old relic, the castellated gateway, clad in ivy, with its grey, crumbling, stone-capped battlements, and escutcheon over the point of the arch, had suffered no change; even the quaint, weather-beaten sundial stood in the centre of the grass-plot, within the court-yard, as they had left it. The yew-trees still lined the high walls which surrounded the court-yard; and the fine old clump of cedars of Lebanon was there—green, stately, and solemn, as in days of yore. The moment, however, that you passed the threshold of the Hall, you sighed at the change that had taken place. Where were now the armed figures, the pikes, bows, guns, spears, swords, and battle-axes, and the quaint old pictures of the early ancestors of the family of the Aubreys? Not a trace now to be seen of them, and it gave Lord Drelincourt a pang as his eye travelled round the bare walls. But the case was not desperate. All the aforesaid pictures still lay rolled up in the lumber-room, where they had continued as articles utterly valueless ever since Mr. Titmouse had ordered them to be taken down. They had been brought down, and now lay on the floor, having been carefully unrolled and examined by the man of taste, who undertook quickly to remove the incipient ravage of mould and dirt at present visible, and to have them suspended in their former position, in such a state as that only the closest scrutiny could detect any difference between their present and former condition. The other relics of antiquity—viz., the armour—had been purchased by the late Lady Stratton at one of the sales of Titmouse's effects, occasioned by an execution against him, and they were still at her late residence, and of course at Lord Drelincourt's disposal, as her ladyship's administrator. These, on his seeing

them, the man of taste pronounced to be very fine and valuable specimens of old English armour, and undertook to have them also in their old places, and in a far better condition even than before. Lord Drelincourt sighed repeatedly as he went over every one of the bare and deserted rooms in the mansion—nothing being left except the beautiful antique mantelpieces of inlaid oak, and the oak-panelling of the different rooms, which, as a part of the freehold, could not be seized as the personal property of Mr. Titmouse. His creditors had swept off, from time to time, anything that had belonged to him—the hall, the dining-room, breakfast-room, drawing-rooms, the library, the bed-rooms, dressing-rooms, boudoirs of Mrs. Aubrey and his sister, the long galleries, the rooms in which Charles and Agnes used to romp and play about—all was now bare and desolate, and the echoes of their footfalls and voices, in passing through them, struck Lord Drelincourt's heart with sadness. But all this was to be quickly remedied; for a *carte blanche* was given to the man of taste at his elbow, who undertook within two, or at most three months' time, to leave nothing for the eye or the heart to sigh for—guided, moreover, as all his movements would be, by those who were so deeply interested in their success. On reaching the two rooms in the north-eastern extremities of the building, the windows of which commanded a view of nearly three-fourths of the estate, he gazed around him in silence which those beside him thoroughly appreciated. There was nothing to shock the eye or pain the heart; for as Mr. Titmouse had been restrained from cutting timber, behold! what a sight would be seen when, in the approaching spring, the groves and forests, stretching far and wide before him, should have put on all their bravery!—And he found, on going over a portion of the grounds, that Mr. Waters and Dickons had kept pretty sharp eyes about them, and maintained everything in infinitely better condition than could have been expected. Mr. Tonson had, moreover, looked very keenly after the game; and Pumpkin undertook, by spring-time, to make his gardens and greenhouses a sight delightful to behold. In a word, Lord Drelincourt left everything under the management of the London man of taste and of Mr. Griffiths, the former being guided, of course, in the purchase of the leading articles of furniture in town, from time to time, by the tastes of Lord and Lady Drelincourt, and Miss Aubrey. The latter was desired to re-engage as many of the former servants of Mr. Aubrey as he could, and informed Lord Drelincourt of two in particular, who had signified their anxious wish to him on the subject; viz., Mrs. Jackson, the housekeeper, who had lived in that capacity with a brother of hers at York, on quitting the services of Mrs. Aubrey. She was, of course, to be immediately reinstated in her old place. The other was Harriet, Miss Aubrey's maid, who, it may be recollected, was so disconsolate at being left behind by Miss Aubrey, who had secured her a place at the late Lady Stratton's, at whose house she still lived, with several of the other servants, the establishment not having been yet finally broken up. Finding, on inquiry, that there was not one single tenant upon the estate, whose rent had not been raised above that which had been paid in Mr. Aubrey's time, he ordered the rent of all to be reduced to that amount, and inquiries to be made after several respectable tenants, whom the extortion of Mr. Titmouse and his agents had driven from their farms, with a view of restoring them in lieu of their very questionable successors.

Having set everything in train for a restoration to the former happy state of things which prevailed at Yatton before the usurpation of Mr. Titmouse, Lord Drelincourt returned to town, but first left a hundred pounds in Dr. Tatham's hands, to be distributed as he thought proper amongst the poorer villagers and neighbours on Christmas Eve; and also insisted on the Doctor's acceptance, himself, of fifty pounds in advance, on account of his salary, a hundred a-year, as chaplain to Lord Drelincourt, which appointment the Doctor received from his

lordship's own hands, and with not a little delight and pride. His lordship, moreover, desired Mr. Parkinson to hold him responsible for any little demand which might be due from the poor Doctor, in respect of the litigation in which he had been involved; and thus Dr. Tatham was made a free man of again, with no further question about his right to tithes, or any more of the interruption of any of the sources of his little income, to which he had lately been subjected; and with fifty pounds, moreover, at his absolute disposal. The Doctor made his appearance on Christmas Day in a very fine suit of black, new hat and all, and had a very full attendance at church, and, moreover, a very cheerful and attentive one.

A day or two after Lord Drelincourt's return to town, Messrs. Mudflint and Bloodsuck received a very pressing invitation to York Castle, whose hospitable owners would receive no refusal. In plain English, they were both taken in execution on the same day, by virtue of two writs of *capias ad satisfaciendum*, for the damages and costs due to Mr. Wigley; viz., £2,960 16s. 4d. from Smirk Mudflint, and £2,760 19s. from Barnabas Bloodsuck, junior. Poor Mr. Mudflint! In vain—in vain had been his Sunday evening's lectures for the last three months, on the errors which pervaded all systems of jurisprudence which annexed any pecuniary liabilities to political offences, instead of leaving the evil to be redressed by the spontaneous good sense of society. A single tap of the sheriff-officer on the eloquent lecturer's shoulder, upset all his fine speculations, just as Corporal Trim said, that one shove of the bayonet was worth all Dr. Slop's fine metaphysical discourses upon the art of war!

In the next *Yorkshire Stingo* (which, alas! between ourselves, was very nearly on its last legs), there appeared one, I must own, of the most magnificent articles of the kind, which I ever read, upon the subject of the atrocious and unparalleled outrage on the liberties of the subject, which had been committed in the incarceration of the two patriots—the martyr-patriots—Mudflint and Bloodsuck. On that day, it said, the sun of liberty had set on England for ever—in fact, for it was a time for speaking out—it had gone down in blood. The enlightened patriot, Mudflint, had at length fallen before the combined forces of bigotry and tyranny, which were now, in the shape of the Church of England and the aristocracy, riding rough-shod over the necks of Englishmen. In his person lay prostrate the sacred rights of conscience, and the inalienable liberty of Englishmen. He had stood forth, nobly foremost, in the fray between the people and their oppressors; and he had fallen!—but he felt how *dulce et decorum* it was *pro patriâ mori*! He felt prouder and happier in his bonds than could ever feel the splendid fiend at F—m, in all his blood-stained magnificence! It then called upon the people, in vivid and spirit-stirring language, to rise against their tyrants like one man, and the days of tyranny were numbered; and stated that the first blow was already struck against the black and monstrous fabric of priestcraft and tyranny; for that a subscription had been already opened on behalf of Mr. Mudflint and Mr. Bloodsuck, for the purpose of discharging the amount of debt and costs for which they had been so infamously deprived of their liberty. An unprecedented sensation had been already excited; and a reference to the advertising columns of their paper would show that the work went bravely on. The friends of religious and civil liberty all over the country were roused; they had but to continue their exertions, and the majesty of the people would be heard in a voice of thunder. This article produced an immense sensation in that part of York Castle where the patriots were confined, and in the immediate neighbourhood of the office of the *Yorkshire Stingo* (in fact, it was the production of the masterly pen of Mudflint himself). Sure enough, on referring to the advertising columns of the *Stingo*, the following did appear fully to warrant the tone of indignant exultation indulged in by the editor;—

"Subscriptions already received (through C. Woodlouse) towards raising a fund for the liberation of the Reverend Smirk Mudflint and Barnabas Bloodsuck, junior, Esq., at present confined in York Castle.

An ardent admirer of the talents and character of the

Reverend Smirk Mudflint	.	.	£200	0	0
Several friends of the Rev. S. M.	.	.	150	0	0
Anonymous	.	.	100	0	0
John Brown, Esq.	.	.	50	0	0
James Smith, Esq.	.	.	50	0	0
John Jones, Esq.	.	.	50	0	0
Sir Harkaway Rotgut Wildfire, Bart.	.	.	50	0	0"

Now, to conceal nothing from the reader, whose confidence my candour has, I feel sure, gained me long ago, I regret to inform him that, with the exception of Sir H. R. Wildfire, Bart., the above noble-spirited individuals, whom no one had ever heard of in or near to Grilston, or, in fact, anywhere else, had their local habitation and their name only in the fertile brain of the Rev. Mr. Mudflint; who had hit upon this device as an effectual one for *getting up the steam* (to use a modern and significant expression), and giving the mighty impulse which was requisite to burst the bonds of the two imprisoned patriots.

Sir Harkaway's name was in the list, to be sure, but that was on the distinct understanding that he was not to be called on to *pay* one farthing; the bargain being, that if he would give the sanction of his name to Messrs. Mudflint and Bloodsuck, they would allow him to have the credit, *gratis*, of so liberally supporting the Liberal cause.

The following, however, were real and *bonâ fide* names and subscriptions collected during the ensuing three weeks; and though, when annexed to the foregoing flourishing commencement of the list, they give it, I must own, a somewhat tadpole appearance, yet here they follow:—

"Subscriptions already received	.	.	£650	0	0
Cephas Woodlouse, Esq.	.	.	1	1	0
Barnabas Bloodsuck, Esq., senior	.	.	1	1	0
Gargle Glistler, Esq.	.	.	0	10	0
Going Gone, Esq.	.	.	0	7	0
Simon Snooks, Esq.	.	.	0	5	0
'Tyrants, beware!!'	.	.	0	2	6
'One who is ready to ascend the scaffold, if required'	.	.	0	2	0
'Behemoth'	.	.	0	1	6
'A foe to priestcraft'	.	.	0	1	0
'Britons NEVER shall be slaves!'	.	.	0	0	9
'Down with the aristocracy!'	.	.	0	0	6
'Free inquiry'	.	.	0	0	4
'Brutus and Cassius'	.	.	0	0	4
'Virtue in prison, better than vice in a castle'	.	.	0	0	3
'Defiance!'	.	.	0	0	2
Small sums	.	.	0	0	1½"

Making a grand total of sums
actually received by the editor
of the *Yorkshire Stingo*, of . . . £3 13 5½

Certainly this was "not as good as could have been expected"—as the editor subsequently owned in his leading article—and asked, with sorrowful indignation, how the people could expect any one to be true to them if they were not true to themselves! He said, "Our cheeks tingle with shame on looking at the paltry list of additional contributions—'Oh, lame and impotent conclusion' to so auspicious a commencement!"—This was very fine indeed. It came very well from Mr. Woodlouse in his editorial capacity; but Mr. Woodlouse, in his capacity as a man of business, was a very different person. Alas! that it should fall to my lot to inquire, in my turn, with sorrowful indignation—was there *no honour among thieves*? But, to come to the point, it fell out in this wise. Patriots must *live*, even in prison; and Mr. Mudflint, being sorely pressed, wrote a letter to his "Dear Woodlouse," asking for the amount of subscriptions received up to that date. He received, in return, a most friendly note, addressed "My dear Mudflint," full of civilities and friendly anxieties—hoping the air of the castle agreed with him—assuring him how he was missed from the Liberal circle, and that he would be received with open arms if ever he got out—and—enclosing a nicely-drawn out *debtor* and *creditor account*!! headed—

"The Rev. Smirk Mudflint and Barnabas Bloodsuck, Esq., in account with Cephas Woodlouse," in which every farthing of the above sum of £3 13s. 5½d. was faithfully set down to the *credit* side, to be sure; but, alas!—on the DEBIT side stood the following!—

"To Advertising lists of Subscriptions in <i>Y. S.</i> (three weeks)	£3	15	6
To Circulars, Hand-bills, &c. (as per order)	2	13	9
Postage and Sundries	0	4	3
	£6	13	6
By cash, amount of Subscriptions received	3	13	5½
Balance due to C. W.	£3	0	0½

On perusing the above document, so pregnant with perfidy and extortion, Mr. Mudflint put it into his pocket, and, slipping off to his sleeping-room, closed the door, took off his garters, and, with very deadly intentions towards himself, was tying them together—casting a ghastly glance, occasionally, at a great hook in the wall, which he could just reach by standing on a stool—when he was discovered, and removed, with his hands tied behind him, "to the strong room," where he was fastened to a heavy wooden bench, and left to his meditations. Solitude and reflection restored the afflicted captive to something like composure and resignation; and after reflecting long and deeply on the selfishness and worthlessness of worldly friendship, his thoughts gradually turned towards a *better place*—a haven of rest—viz., the Insolvent Debtors' Court.

The effect of this infamous treatment upon his fellow-captive, Bloodsuck, was quite different. Having sworn one single prodigious oath, he enclosed the above account, and sent it off to his father, in the following pithy letter:—

"York Castle, 29th Dec. 18—.

"DEAR FATHER,—Read the enclosed! and then *sell up* Woodlouse.—Your affectionate Son,

"B. BLOODSUCK, Jun."

The old gentleman, on reading the above and its enclosure, immediately issued execution against Woodlouse, on a *cognovit* of his for £150, which he had given to the firm of Bloodsuck and Son for the balance of a bill of theirs for defending him unsuccessfully against an action for an infamous libel.

Nobody would bid anything for his moribund "*Stingo*"; he had no other effects; and was immediately taken in execution, and sent to York Castle, where he, Bloodsuck, and Mudflint, whenever they met, could hardly be restrained from tearing one another's eyes out.

'Tis thus that reptiles of this sort prey upon each other!—To "begin nothing of which you have not well considered the end," is a saying, the propriety of which every one recognizes when he hears it enunciated, but no one thinks of it in the conduct of actual life; and what follows will illustrate the truth of my reflection. It seemed a capital notion of Mudflint's to send forth such a splendid list of sham subscribers, and it was natural enough for Mr. Bloodsuck to assent to it, and Mr. Woodlouse to become the party to it which he did—but who could have foreseen the consequences? A quarrel among rogues is almost always attended with ugly and unexpected consequences to themselves. Now, here was a mortal feud between Mr. Woodlouse on the one side, and Messrs. Mudflint and Bloodsuck on the other; and in due course of time they all applied, as a matter of course, for relief under the Insolvent Debtors' Act. Before they got to the question concerning the nature of the debt—viz., the penalties in an action for the odious offence of bribery—in the case of Mr. Mudflint, he had to encounter a very serious and truly unexpected obstacle—viz., he had given in, with the minutest accuracy, the items of the subscription, amounting to £3 13s. 5½d., but had observed the most mysterious and (as he might suppose) politic silence concerning the *greater sum* of £650, and which had been brought under the notice of the creditors of Messrs. Mudflint and Bloodsuck by Mr. Woodlouse. On the newspaper acknowledging the receipt of that large sum being produced in court, Mr. Mudflint made very light of the matter, simply smiling and shrugging his shoulders; but when Mr. Woodlouse was called as a witness, you may guess the consternation of Mr. Mudflint, on hearing him swear that he had certainly never himself received the money, but had no doubt of Mr. Mudflint having done so—which, in fact, had always been his impression; for when Mr. Mudflint had furnished him with the list, which he produced in court, in Mudflint's handwriting, he inserted it in his paper as a matter of course—taking it to be a *bonâ fide* and matter-of-fact transaction. The evident consternation of Mudflint satisfied all who heard him of his villainy, and the truth and honesty of Woodlouse, who stuck to this new version of the affair manfully. But this opened quite a new view of his position to Mr. Bloodsuck; who, on finding that he must needs adopt either Mudflint's or Woodlouse's version of the affair, began to reflect upon the disagreeable effect it would have thereafter upon the connection and character of the respectable firm of Bloodsuck and Son, for him to appear to have been a party to such a shocking fraud upon the public, as a sham list of subscribers, and to so large an amount. He therefore swore stoutly that he, too, had always been under the impression that Mr. Mudflint had received the £650, and very much regretted to find that that gentleman must have been appropriating so large a sum to himself, instead of being now ready to divide it between their respective creditors. This tallied with Woodlouse's account of the matter; and infinitely disgusted was that gentleman at finding himself so cleverly outwitted by Bloodsuck. On this Mudflint turned with fury upon Bloodsuck, and he upon Mudflint, who abused Woodlouse; and eventual the court, unable to believe any of them, remanded them all, as a pack of rogues, till the next court day; addressing a very stern warning to Mr. Mudflint, concerning the serious consequences of his persisting in fraudulently concealing his property from his creditors. By the time of his being next brought up, the persecuted Mudflint had bethought himself of a bold mode of collaterally corroborating the truth of his version of the affair of that accursed first list of subscribers—viz., summoning Sir Harkaway Rotgut Wildfire as a witness in his behalf; whom he confidently asked whether, for all his name appeared in the

subscription list, he had really ever given one farthing of the £50 there mentioned? Now, had Mr. Mudflint been a long-headed man, he would never have taken this step; for Sir Harkaway could never have been supposed capable of bringing himself to admit that he had allowed himself to be a party to such a dirty deceit upon the public. On a careful consideration of the circumstances, therefore, Sir Harkaway, having an eye solely to his own credit, first said with a somewhat haughty, but at the same time embarrassed air, that he was not in the habit of allowing his name to appear in such lists without his having actually paid the sum named; then, on being pressed, he swore that he *thought* he must have paid; then, that he had very *little* doubt on the subject; then, that he had *no* doubt on the matter at all; then, that he knew that in point of fact he *had* advanced the money; and finally, that he then recollected all the circumstances distinctly!—On this complete confirmation of the roguery of Mudflint, he was instantly reprimanded severely, and remanded indefinitely; the whole court believing that he had appropriated to his own use every farthing of the £650, defrauding even his fellow-prisoner, Mr. Bloodsuck. It was a good while before Mr. Mudflint recovered from the effects of this astounding conduct of Sir Harkaway. When his wits had returned to him, he felt certain that, somewhere or other, he had a letter from Sir Harkaway, which would satisfy everybody of the peculiarly unpleasant position in which the worthy baronet had placed himself. And, sure enough, on desiring his wife to institute a rigorous search over his papers, she succeeded in discovering the following remarkable document, which she at once forwarded to her disconsolate husband:—

“View-Hallo Hall, 27th Dec. 18—.

“SIR,

“I have a considerable regard for your services to liberty (civil and religious), and am willing to serve you in the way you wish. You may put me down, therefore, in the list for anything you please, as my name carries weight in the country—but, of course, you know better than to kill your decoy-duck.

“Sir, your obedient servant,

“H. R. WILDFIRE.

“The Rev. S. MUDFLINT, etc., etc.”

This unfortunate letter, in the first frenzy of his rage and exultation, Mudflint instantly forwarded, with a statement of facts, to the editor of the *True Blue* newspaper, which carried it into every corner of the county on the very next morning; and undoubtedly gave thereby a heavy blow and a great discouragement to the Liberal cause all over Yorkshire, for Sir Harkaway had always been looked upon as a very staunch and powerful supporter of it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VERY shortly after Messrs. Mudflint and Bloodsuck had gone to pay this their long-expected visit to the governor of York Castle, Mr. Parkinson required possession of the residence of each of them, in Yatton, to be delivered up to him on behalf of Lord Drelincourt, allowing a week's time for the removal of the few effects of each; after which period had elapsed, the premises in question were completely cleared of everything belonging to their late odious occupants—who, in all human probability, would never again have an opportunity of settling themselves in Yatton—infinity to the delight of Dr. Tatham and all the better sort of the inhabitants. In a similar manner another crying nuisance

—viz., the public-house known by the name of *The Topers' Arms*—was got rid of; it having been resolved upon by Lord Drelincourt, that there should be thenceforth but one public-house in Yatton, viz.—the quiet, old, original *Aubrey Arms*, and which was quite sufficient for the purposes of the inhabitants of the village. Two or three other persons who had crept into the village during the *Titmouse* dynasty were similarly dealt with, infinitely to the satisfaction of those left behind; and by Christmas Day the village was beginning to show signs of a return to its former condition. The works going on at the Hall gave an air of cheerful animation to the whole neighbourhood, and afforded employment at a season of the year when employment was most wanted. The chapel and residence of the Rev. Mr. Muddflint underwent a rapid and remarkable alteration. The fact was, that Mr. Delamere had conceived the idea, which, with Lord Drelincourt's consent, he proceeded to carry immediately into execution, of pulling down the existing structure, and raising in its stead a very beautiful school, and filling it with scholars, and providing a matron for it, by way of giving a pleasant surprise to Kate on her return to Yatton. He engaged a well-known architect, who submitted to him a plan of a very beautiful little Gothic structure, adapted for receiving some eighteen or twenty scholars, and also affording a permanent residence for the mistress; and whose plan being heartily approved of by Mr. Delamere and Dr. Tatham, whom he had taken into his counsels in the affair, they received a pledge that the school should be complete and fit for occupation within three months' time. There was to be in the front a small and tasteful tablet, bearing the inscription—

C. A.

Foundatrix.

18—.

The mistress of Kate's former school gladly relinquished a similar situation which she had held in another part of the country, in order to return to her old one at Yatton, and Dr. Tatham was, in the first instance, to select the scholars, who were to be clothed, at Delamere's expense, in the former neat and simple attire which had been adopted by Miss Aubrey.

About this time there came a general election, the nation being thoroughly disgusted with the character and conduct of a great number of those who had, in the direful hubbub of the last election, contrived to creep into the House of Commons. Besides, public affairs were getting daily into a more deranged and dangerous condition: in fact, the Ministers might have been compared to a parcel of mischievous and venturesome boys, who had found their way into the vast and complicated machinery of some steam-engine, and set it into a fearful motion, which they could neither understand nor govern. All I have to do, however, at present, with that most important election, is to state its effect upon the representation of the borough of Yatton. Its late member, Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse, it completely annihilated. Of course, he made no attempt to stand again; nor, in fact, did any one in the same interest. The *Yorkshire Stingo*, in its very last number (of which twelve only were sold), tried desperately to get up a contest, but in vain. Mr. Going Gone—and even Mr. Glistler—were quite willing to have stood—but, first, neither of them could afford to pay his share of the expenses of the hustings; and, secondly, there were exceeding great difficulties in the way of either of them procuring a qualification. Besides, the more sensible even of the strong Liberal electors had become alive to the exquisite absurdity of returning such persons as Titmouse, or any one of his class. Then the Quaint Club had ceased to exist, partly through the change of political feeling which was rapidly gaining ground in the borough, and partly through terror of the consequences of bribery, of which the miserable fate of Muddflint

and Bloodsuck was a fearful instance. In fact, the disasters which had befallen those gentlemen, and Mr. Titmouse, had completely paralyzed and crushed the Liberal party at Yatton, and disabled it from ever attempting to contend against the paramount and legitimate influence of Lord Drelincourt. The result of all this was, the return, without a contest, of the Honourable Geoffrey Lovel Delamere as the representative of the borough of Yatton in the new Parliament; an event, which he penned his first frank in communicating to a certain young lady then in London.

Nothing, doubtless, could be more delightful for Mr. Delamere; but in what a direful predicament did the loss of his seat place the late member, Mr. Titmouse? Just consider for a moment. Mr. Flummery's promise to him of a "place" had vanished, of course, into thin air—having answered its purpose of securing Mr. Titmouse's vote up to the very moment of the dissolution. Foiled thus miserably in this quarter, Mr. Titmouse applied himself with redoubled energy to render available his other resources, and made repeated and most impassioned applications to Mr. O'Gibbet—who never took, however, the slightest notice of any of them: considering very justly that Mr. Titmouse was no more entitled to receive back, than he had originally been to lend, the £500 in question. As for Mr. O'Doodle and Mr. M'Squash—they, like himself, were thrown out of Parliament; and no one upon earth seemed able to tell what had become of them, though there were a good many people who made it their business to inquire into the matter very anxiously. Then there was an honourable youngster, who owed him a hundred pounds;—but he, the moment that he had lost his election, caused it to be given out to any one interested in his welfare—and there suddenly appeared to be a great many such—that he was gone on a scientific expedition to the South Pole.—All these things drove Mr. Titmouse very nearly beside himself—and certainly his position was a little precarious. When Parliament was dissolved he had in his pocket a couple of sovereigns, the residue of a five-pound note, out of which, *mirabile dictu*, he had actually succeeded in teasing Mr. Flummery on the evening of the last division; and these two sovereigns, and a shirt or two, and a copy of *Boxiana*, were all his assets to meet liabilities of about a hundred thousand pounds; and the panoply of Parliamentary "privilege" was dropping off, as it were, daily. In a very few days' time, in fact, he would be at the mercy of a terrific host of creditors, who were waiting to spring upon him like so many famished wolves. Every one of them had gone on with his action up to *judgment* for both debt and costs—and had his *Ca. Ca.* and *F. Fa.* ready for use at an instant's notice. There were three of his creditors—the three Jews, Israel Fang, Mordecai Gripe, and Mephibosheth Maharshalal-hash-baz—who had entered into a solemn vow with one another that they would never lose sight of Titmouse for one moment, by day or by night, whatever pains or expense it might cost them—until, the period of privilege having expired, they should be at liberty to plunge their talons into the carcass of their little debtor. There were, in fact, at least a hundred of his creditors ready to pounce upon him the instant that he should make the slightest attempt to quit the country. His lodgings consisted, at this time, of a miserable little room in a garret at the back of a small house in Westminster, not far from the Houses of Parliament, and of the two, inferior to the room in Closet Court, Oxford Street, in which he was first presented to the reader. Here he would often lie in bed half the day, drinking weak—because he could not afford strong—brandy and water, and endeavouring to consider "what the devil" he had done with the immense sum of money which he had had at his disposal—how he would act if by some lucky chance he should again become wealthy—and, in short, "what the plague was now to become of him. What was he to do? Whither should he go?—To sea?—Then it must be as a common sailor—if any one would now take him! Or suppose he were to enlist?

Glorious war, and all that ; but both these schemes pre-supposed his being able to escape from his creditors, who, he had a vehement suspicion, were on the look-out for him in all directions. Every review that he thus took of his hopeless position and prospects, ended in a fiendish degree of abhorrence of his parents, whose fault alone it was that he was thus turned out of a splendid estate of ten thousand a-year, and made worse than a beggar of. He would sometimes spring out of bed, convulsively clutching his hands together, and wishing himself beside their grave, to tear them out of it. He thought of Mr. Quirk, Mr. Snap, Mr. Tag-rag, with fury ; but whenever he thought of Mr. Gammon, he shuddered all over, as if in the presence of a baleful spectre. For all this, he preserved the same impudent strut and swagger in the street which had ever distinguished him. Every day of his life he walked towards the scenes of his recent splendour, which seemed to attract him irresistibly. He would pass the late Earl of Dreddlington's house, in Grosvenor Square, gazing at it, and at the hatchment suspended in front of it. Then he would wander on to Park Lane, and gaze with unutterable feelings—poor little wretch!—at the house which once had been his and Lady Cecilia's, but was then occupied by a nobleman, whose tasteful equipage and servants were often standing at and before the door. He would, on some of those occasions, feel as though he should like to drop down dead, and be out of all his misery. If ever he met and nodded, or spoke to those with whom he had till recently been on the most familiar terms, he was encountered by a steady stare, and sometimes a smile, that withered his very heart within him, and made the last three years of his life appear to have been but a dream. The little dinner that he ate—for he had almost entirely lost his appetite through long addiction to drinking—was at a small tavern, at only a few doors' distance from his lodgings, and where he generally spent his evenings, for want of any other place to go to ; and he formed at length a sort of intimacy with a good-natured and very respectable gentleman, who came nearly as often thither as Titmouse himself, and would sit conversing with him very pleasantly over his cigar and a glass of spirits and water. The oftener Titmouse saw him, the more he liked him ; and at length, taking him entirely into his confidence, unbosomed himself concerning his unhappy present circumstances, and still more unhappy prospects. This man was a brother of Maharshalaal-hash-baz the Jew, and a sheriff's officer, keeping watch upon the movements, night and day, alternately with another who did not attract Titmouse's notice. After having canvassed several modes of disposing of himself, none of which were satisfactory to either Titmouse or his friend, he hinted that he was aware that there were lots of the enemy on the look-out for him, and who would be glad to get at him ; but he knew, he said, that he was as safe as in a castle for some time yet to come ; and he also mentioned a scheme which had occurred to him—but this was all in the strictest confidence—viz., to write to Lord Drelincourt (who was, after all, his relation of some sort or other, and ought to be devilish glad to get all his, Titmouse's, property so easily), and ask him for some situation under government, either in France, India, or America, and give him a trifle to set him up at starting, and help him to “nick the bums !” His friend listened attentively, and then protested that he thought it an excellent idea, and Mr. Titmouse had better write the letter and take it at once. Upon this Titmouse sent for pen, ink, and paper ; and while his friend leaned back calmly smoking his cigar, and sipping his gin and water, poor Titmouse wrote the following letter to Lord Drelincourt, which is the last letter of his in my possession :—

“To the Right Hon. LORD DRELCINCOURT.

“MY LORD—

“Naturally situated In The Way which I Am With y^r lordship Most Unpleasantly Addressing you On A Matter of that Nature most Painful To My

feelings Considering My surprising Forlorn Condition, And So Sudden Which Who c^d Have A Little While Ago suppos'd. Y^r lordship (of Course) Is Aware That There Is No fault of Mine, But Rather My Cursed parents w^h Ought To be Ashamed of Themselves For Their Improper Conduct w^h Was never made Acquainted with till Lately with Great Greif. Alas. I Only Wish I Had Never Been Born, or Was Dead and Comfortable in An Erly Grave. I Humbly, My Lord, Endeavoured To Do My Duty when In the Upper Circles and Especially to the People, which I Always voted for, *Steady*, in The House, And Never Injured Any One, Much less you, My Lord, if You Will Believe Me, For I surely w^d. Not Have Come Upon You In the Way I did My Lord But Was obliged, And Regret, &c. I Am Most Truly Miserable, Being (Betwixt You and Me, my Lord) over Head and Years in debt, And Have Nothing To pay With and out of *The House* So Have No Protection and Fear am Going Very Fast To y^e Dogs, my Lord, Swindle O'Gibbet, Esq. M.P. Owes me £500 (borrowed Money) and Will not Pay and is a Shocking Scamp, but (depend upon it) I will stick To Him Like a Leach. Of Course Now your Lordship Is Got into y^e Estate &c., You Will Have y^e Rents, etc., but Is Not *Half The Last Quarter* Mine Seeing I Was in possession w^h is 9-10ths of y^e law. But give it All up To you, willingly Now For what can't Be cur'd, Must Be Indur'd can y^r lordship Get me *Some Foreign* Appointment *Abroad* w^h sh^d be much obliged for and Would Get Me out of the Way of Troubling y^r lordship about the Rents w^h *rectly give Up*. You Being Got To that *High Rank* w^h was to Have Been mine can do What You please doubtless. Am Sorry to Say I am Most Uncommon Hard Up Since I Have Broke up. And am nearly Run Out. Consider my Lord How Easy I Let You Win y^e property. When Might Have Given Your Lordship Trouble. If you will Remember this And Be So obliging to *Lend me a £10 Note* (For y^e Present) Will much oblige

"Your Lordship's to Command, Most obed^t

"TITTLBAT TITMOUSE.

"P.S. I Leave This with my *Own Hand* That you May be Sure and Get it. Remember me to Miss A. and Lady D."

Mr. Titmouse contented himself with telling his new friend merely the substance of the above epistle, and having sealed it up, he asked his friend if he were disposed for a walk to the West End; and on being answered in the affirmative, they both set off for Lord Drelincourt's house in Dover Street. When they had reached it, his friend stepped to a little distance; while Titmouse, endeavouring to assume a confident air, hemmed, twitched up his shirt-collar, and knocked and rung with all the boldness of a gentleman coming to dinner. Open flew the door in a moment; and—

"My Lord Drelincourt's—isn't it?" inquired Titmouse, holding his letter in his hand, and tapping his ebony cane pretty loudly against his legs.

"Of course it is! What d'ye want?" quoth the porter sternly, enraged at being disturbed at such an hour by such a puppy of a fellow as then stood before him—for the bloom was off the finery of Titmouse; and who that knew the world would call at seven o'clock with a letter? Titmouse would have answered the fellow pretty sharply, but was afraid of endangering the success of his application: so, with considerable calmness, he replied—

"Oh—it is? Then have the goodness to deliver this into his lordship's own hand—it's of great importance." "Very well," said the porter stiffly, not dreaming what a remarkable personage was the individual whom he was addressing, and the next instant shut the door in his face. "Dem impudent blackguard!" said he, as he rejoined his friend—his heart almost bursting with mortification and fury; "I've a great mind to call to-morrow, 'pon my sowl—and get him discharged!"

He had dated this letter from his lodgings, where, about ten o'clock on the ensuing morning, a gentleman—in fact, Lord Drelincourt's man of business—called, and asking to see Mr. Titmouse, gave into his hands a letter, of which the following is a copy :—

*“ Dover Street,
“ Wednesday Morning.*

“ Lord Drelincourt, in answer to Mr. Titmouse's letter, requests his acceptance of the enclosed Bank of England Note for Ten Pounds. Lord D. wishes Mr. Titmouse to furnish him with an address, to which any further communications on the part of Lord D. may be addressed.”

On repairing to the adjoining tavern, soon after receiving the above most welcome note, Mr. Titmouse fortunately (!) fell in with his friend, and, with somewhat of an air of easy triumph, showed him Lord Drelincourt's note, and its enclosure. Some time afterwards, having smoked each a couple of cigars and drank a couple of tumblers of brandy and water, Mr. Titmouse's friend got very confidential, and in a low whisper said that he had been thinking over Mr. Titmouse's case ever since they were talking together the night before ; and for five pounds would put him in the way of escaping all danger immediately, provided no questions were asked by Mr. Titmouse ; for he, the speaker, was running a great risk in what he was doing. Titmouse placed his hand over his heart, exclaiming, “ Honour—honour ! ” and having called for change from the landlord, gave a five-pound note into the hand of his companion, who thereupon, in a mysterious undertone, told him that by ten o'clock the next morning he would have a hackney coach at the door of his lodgings, and would at once convey him safely to a vessel then in the river, and bound for the South of France, where Mr. Titmouse might remain till he had in some measure settled his affairs with his creditors. Sure enough, at the appointed time, the coach drew up at the door of the house where Titmouse lodged ; and within a few moments' time he came downstairs with a small portmanteau, and entered the coach, where sat his friend, evidently not wishing to be recognized or seen by anybody passing. They talked together earnestly and eagerly as they journeyed eastward ; and just as they arrived opposite a huge dismal-looking building, with a large door, and immensely high walls, the coach stopped. Three or four persons were standing, as if they had been in expectation of the arrival of the coach ; and, requesting Mr. Titmouse to alight for a moment, his friend opened the coach door from within, and let down the steps. The moment that poor Titmouse had got out, he was instantly surrounded, and seized by the collar by those who were standing by ; his “ friend ” had disappeared, and, almost petrified with amazement and fright, and taken quite off his guard by the suddenness of the movement, he was hurried through the doorway of the King's Bench prison, the three Jews following close at his heels, and conducted into a very gloomy room. There he seemed first to awake to the horrors of his situation, and went into a paroxysm of despair and fury. He sprang madly towards the door, and on being repulsed by those standing beside him, stamped violently about the room, shouting, “ Murder, murder ! thieves ! ” Then he pulled his hair, shook his head with frantic vehemence, and presently sank into a seat, from which, after a few moments, he sprang wildly, and broke his cane into a number of pieces, scattering them about the room like a madman. Then he cried passionately : more, in fact like a frantic school-girl than a man ; and struck his head violently with his fists. All this while the three Jews were looking on with a grin of devilish gratification at the little wretch's agony. His frenzy lasted so long that he was removed to a strong room, and threatened with being put into a straight-waistcoat if he continued to conduct himself so outrageously.

The fact of his being thus safely housed, soon became known, and within a

day or two's time the miserable little fellow was completely overwhelmed by his creditors; who, absurd and unavailing as were their proceedings, came rushing down upon him, one after another, with as breathless an impetuosity as if they thought he had been a mass of solid gold, which was to become the spoil of him that could first seize it. The next day his fate was announced to the world by paragraphs in all the morning newspapers, which informed their readers that "yesterday Mr. Titmouse, late M.P. for Yatton, was secured by a skilful stratagem, just as he was on the point of quitting his country for America, and lodged in the King's Bench Prison, at the suit of three creditors, to the extent of upwards of sixty thousand pounds. It is understood that his debts considerably exceed the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds." As soon as he had become calm enough to do so—viz., three or four days after his incarceration—he wrote a long, dismal epistle to Lord Drelincourt, and also one to Miss Aubrey, passionately reminding them both that he was, after all, of the same blood with themselves, only luck had gone for them and against him, and therefore he hoped they would "remember him, and do something to get him out of his trouble." He seemed to cling as though he had a claim upon them—instead of being himself Lord Drelincourt's debtor to the amount of *at least*, twenty thousand pounds, had his lordship, instead of inclining a compassionate ear to his entreaties, chosen to fling his heavy claim into the scale against him. This, however, was a view of the case which never occurred to poor Titmouse. Partly of their own accord, and partly at Miss Aubrey's earnest entreaty, Lord Drelincourt and Mr. Delamere went to the King's Bench prison, and had a long interview with him—his lordship being specially anxious to ascertain, if possible, whether Titmouse had been originally privy to the monstrous fraud, by means of which he had succeeded in possessing himself of Yatton, at so fearful a cost of suffering to those whom he had deprived of it. While he was chattering away, more after the fashion of a newly-caged ape than a *man*, with eager and impassioned tone and gesticulation—with a profused usage of his favourite phraseology—"Pon my soul!" "Pon my life!" "By Jove!" and of the several shocking oaths, for which he was repeatedly and sternly rebuked by Lord Drelincourt, with what profound and melancholy interest did the latter regard the strange being before him, and think of the innumerable extraordinary things which he had heard concerning him! Here was the widowed husband of the Lady Cecilia, and son-in-law of the Earl of Dreddlington—that broken pillar of pride!—broken, alas! in the very moment of his imaginary magnificence! Here was the late member of parliament for the borough of Yatton, whose constituency had deliberately declared him possessed of their complete confidence!—on whose individual vote in parliament had several times depended the existence of the king's ministry, and the passing of the measures of the greatest possible magnitude! This was he whom all society—even the most brilliant—had courted as a great lion—This was the same time owner of Yatton! who had aspired to the hand of Miss Aubrey! who had for two years revelled in every species of luxury, splendour, and profligacy! Here was the individual at whose instance—at whose nod Lord Drelincourt had been deprived of his liberty, ruthlessly torn from the bleeding bosom of his family, and he and they for many many weary months subjected to the most harassing and heart-breaking privations and distresses! On quitting him, Lord Drelincourt put into his hand a ten-pound note, with which Titmouse seemed—though he dared not say so—not a little disappointed. His lordship and Mr. Delamere were inclined, upon the whole, to believe that Titmouse had not been aware of his illegitimacy till the issue of the ecclesiastical proceedings was known; but from many remarks he let fall, they were satisfied that Mr. Gammon must have been aware of the fact from a very early period—for Titmouse spoke freely of the constant mysterious threats he was in the habit of receiving from Mr.

Gammon. Lord Drelincourt had promised Titmouse to consider in what way he could serve him ; and during the course of the day instructed Mr. Runnington to put the case into the hands of some attorney of the Insolvent Debtors' Court, with a view of endeavouring to obtain for the unfortunate little wretch the "*benefit of the Act.*" As soon as the course of practice would admit of it, Mr. Titmouse was brought up in the ordinary way before the court, which was quite crowded by persons either interested as creditors, or curious to see so celebrated a person as Tittlebat Titmouse. The court was astounded at the sight of the number and magnitude of his liabilities—a hundred thousand pounds at least !—against which he had nothing to set except the following items :—

"Cash lent Swindle O'Gibbet, Esq., M.P.	£500
Do. do. Phelim O'Doodle	. . . 200
Do. do. Micah M'Squash	. . . 100"

—together with some other similar but lesser sums ; but for none of them could he produce any vouchers, except for the sum lent to the Hon. Empty Belly, who had been ass enough to give him his I O U. Poor Titmouse's discharge was most vehemently opposed on the part of his creditors—particularly the three Jews—whose frantic and indecorous conduct in open court occasioned the chief commissioner to order them to be twice removed. *They* would have had Titmouse remanded to the day of his death ! After several adjourned and lengthened hearings, the court pronounced him not to be entitled to his discharge till he should have remained in prison for the space of eighteen calendar months ; on hearing which he burst into a fit of loud and bitter weeping, and was removed from court, wringing his hands and shaking his head in perfect despair. As soon as this result had been communicated to Lord Drelincourt (who had taken special care that his name should not be among those of Mr. Titmouse's creditors), he came to the humane determination of allowing him a hundred and fifty pounds a-year for his life, *payable weekly*, to commence from the date of his being remanded to prison. For the first month or so he spent all his weekly allowance in brandy and water and cigars, within three days after receiving it. Then he took to gambling with his fellow prisoners ; but, all of a sudden, he turned over quite a new leaf. The fact was, that he had become intimate with an unfortunate literary hack, who used to procure small sums by writing articles for newspapers and magazines ; and at his suggestion, Titmouse fell to work upon several quires of foolscap : the following being the title given to his projected work by his new friend—

"UPS and DOWNS :
Being
Memoirs of My Life,
by
TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE, Esq.,
Late M.P. for Yatton."

He got so far on with his task as to fill three quires of paper ; and it is a fact that a fashionable publisher got scent of the undertaking, came to the prison, and offered him five hundred pounds for his manuscript, provided only that he would undertake that it should fill three volumes. This greatly stimulated Titmouse ; but, unfortunately, he fell ill before he had completed the first volume, and never, during the remainder of his confinement, recovered himself sufficiently to proceed further with his labours. I once had an opportunity of glancing over what he had written, which was really very curious. I do not know what has since become of the manuscript. During the last month of his

imprisonment he became intimate with a villainous young Jew attorney, who, under the pretence of commencing proceedings in the House of Lords (!) for the recovering of the Yatton property once more from Lord Drelincourt, contrived to get into his own pocket more than one-half of the weekly sum allowed by that nobleman to his grateful pensioner ! On the very day of his discharge, Titmouse went off straight to the lodgings of Mr. Swindle O'Gibbet to demand payment of the five hundred pounds due to him from that gentleman, to whom he became a source of inconceivable vexation and torment. Following him about with a sort of insane and miserable pertinacity, Titmouse lay in wait for him now at his lodgings—then at the door of the House of Commons; dogged him from one point to the other; assailed him with passionate entreaties and reproaches in the open street: went to the public meetings over which Mr. O'Gibbet presided, or where he spoke (always on behalf of the rights of conscience and the liberty of the subject), and would call out—"Pay me my five hundred pounds! I want my money! Where's my five hundred pounds?" on which Mr. O'Gibbet would point to him, call him an "impostor! a liar!" furiously adding that he was only hired by the enemies of the people to come and disturb their proceedings: whereupon (which was surely a new way of paying old debts) Titmouse was always shuffled about—his hat knocked over his eyes—and he was finally kicked out, and once or twice pushed down from the top to the bottom of the stairs. The last time that this happened, poor Titmouse's head struck with dreadful force against the banisters; and he lay for some time stunned and bleeding. On being carried to a doctor's shop, he was shortly afterwards seized with a fit of epilepsy. This seemed to have given the finishing stroke to his shattered intellects; for he sank soon afterwards into a state of idiocy. Through the kindness and at the expense of Lord Drelincourt, he was admitted an inmate of a private lunatic asylum, in the Curtain Road, near Hoxton, where he still continues. He is very harmless; and after dressing himself in the morning with extraordinary pains—never failing to have a glimpse visible of his white pocket handkerchief out of the pocket in the breast of his surtout—nor to have his boots very brightly polished—he generally sits down with a glass of strong and warm toast and water, and a coloured straw, which he imagines to be brandy and water, and a cigar. He complained, at first, that the brandy and water was very weak; but he is now reconciled to it, and sips his two tumblers daily with an air of tranquil enjoyment. When I last saw him he was thus occupied. On my approaching him, he hastily stuck his quizzing-glass into his eye, where it was retained by the force of muscular contraction, while he stared at me with all his former expression of rudeness and presumption. 'Twas at once a ridiculous and a mournful sight.

I should have been very glad, if, consistently with my duty as an impartial historian, I could have concealed some discreditable features in the conduct of Mr. Tag-rag, subsequently to his unfortunate bankruptcy. I shall not, however, dwell upon them at greater length than is necessary. His creditors were so much dissatisfied with his conduct, that not one of them could be prevailed upon to sign his certificate, by which means he was prevented from reestablishing himself in business, even had he been able to find the means of so doing; since, in the eye of our law, any business carried on by an uncertificated bankrupt, is carried on by him only as a trustee for his creditors. His temper getting more and more soured, he became at length quite intolerable to his wife, whom he had married only for her fortune (£800, and the good-will of her late husband's business, as a retail draper and hosier, in Little Turn-stile, Holborn). When he found that Mrs. Tag-rag would not forsake her unhappy daughter, he snapped his fingers at her, and, I regret to say, told her that she and her daughter, and her respectable husband, might all go to the devil together—he must shift for himself; and, in fact, he took himself off. Mr. Dismal Horror found that he

had made a sad business of it, in marrying Miss Tag-rag, who brought him two children in the first nineteen months, and seemed likely to go on at that rate for a long time to come, which made Mr. Horror think very seriously of following the example of his excellent father-in-law—viz., deserting his wife. They had contrived to scrape together a bit of a day-school for young children, in Goswell Street; but which was inadequate to the support of themselves, and also of Mrs. Tag-rag, who had failed in obtaining the situation of pew-opener to a neighbouring dissenting chapel. The scheme he had conceived, he soon afterwards carried into effect; for, whereas he went out one day saying he should return in an hour's time, he nevertheless did not return at all. Burning with zeal to display his pulpit talents, he took to street-preaching, and at length succeeded in getting around him a crowd of hearers, many of them most serious and attentive pick-pockets, with dexterous fingers and devout faces, wherever he held forth, which was principally in the neighbourhood of the Tower and Smithfield—till he was driven away by the police, who never interfered with his little farce till he sent his hat round, when, to preserve the peace, they would rush in, disperse the crowd, and take him into custody to the police-offices, where, in spite of his eloquent defences, he several times got sentenced to three months' imprisonment, as an incorrigible disturber of the peace, and in league with the questionable characters, who—the police declared—were invariably members of every congregation he addressed.

One occasion of his being taken into custody was rather a singular one:—Mr. Tag-rag happened to be passing while he was holding forth, and, unable to contain his fury, made his way immediately in front of the impassioned preacher; and, sticking his fists in his side a-kimbo, exclaimed, "*Aren't* you a nice young man now?"—which quite disconcerted his pious son-in-law, who threw his hymn-book in his father-in-law's face, which bred such a disturbance that the police rushed in, and took them both off in custody to the police-office, where such a scene ensued as beggars all description.

What has since become of Mr. Horror, I do not know; but the next thing I heard of Mr. Tag-rag was his entering into the employ of no other person than Mr. Huckaback, who had been for some time settled in a little shop in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square. Having, however, inadvertently shown in to Mr. Huckaback one of the creditors to whom he had given special orders to be denied, that gentleman instantly turned him out of the shop, in a fury, without character or wages; which latter, however, Tag-rag soon compelled him, by the process of the Court of Requests, to pay him, being one week's entire salary. In passing one day a mock auction, on the left-hand side of the Poultry, I could not help pausing to admire the cool effrontery with which the Jew in the box was putting up articles to sale to four patient puffers—his entire audience—and who bid against one another in a very business-like way for everything that was proposed for their consideration. What was my astonishment and concern, when one of the puffers, who stood with his back towards me, happened to look round for a moment, to discover in him my friend Mr. Tag-rag!! His hat was nicely brushed, but all the "*nap*" was off; his coat was clean, threadbare, and evidently had been made for some other person; under his arm was an old cotton umbrella; and in his hands, which were clasped behind him, were a pair of antiquated black gloves, doubled up, only for show, evidently not for use.

Notwithstanding, however, he had sunk thus low, there happened to him, some time afterwards, one or two surprising strokes of good fortune. First of all, he contrived to get a sum of three hundred pounds from one of his former debtors, who imagined that Tag-rag was authorized by his assignees to receive it. Nothing, however, of the kind; and Tag-rag quietly opened a small shop in the neighbourhood of St. George's in the East, and began to scrape together a tolerable business. Reading one day a flourishing speech in

parliament, on the atrocious enormity of calling upon Dissenters to pay Church-rates—it occurred to Mr. Tag-rag as likely to turn out a good speculation, and greatly increase his business, if he were to become a martyr for conscience sake; and after turning the thing about a good deal in his mind, he determined on refusing to pay the sum of eightpence-halfpenny, due in respect of a rate recently made for the repair of the church steeple, which was very nearly falling down. In a very civil and unctuous manner, he announced to the collector his determination to refuse the payment on strictly conscientious grounds. The collector expostulated—but in vain. Then came the amazed churchwardens—Tag-rag, however, was inflexible. The thing began to get wind, and the Rector, an amiable and learned man—and an earnest lover of peace in his parish—came to try his powers of persuasion—but in vain; 'twas impossible to divert Mr. Tag-rag's eye from the glorious crown of martyrdom he had resolved upon earning. Then he called upon the minister of the congregation where he "worshipped," and with tears and agitation unbosomed himself upon the subject, and besought his counsel. The intelligent and pious minister got excited; so did his leading people. A meeting was called at his chapel, the result of which was a declaration that Mr. Tag-rag's conduct was most praiseworthy and noble, and that he deserved to be supported. Several leading members of the congregation, who had never dealt with him before, suddenly became customers of his. The upshot of the matter was, that after a prodigious stir, Mr. Tag-rag became a victim in right earnest; and was taken into custody by virtue of a writ *De Contumace Capiendo*, amidst the indignant sympathy and admiration of all those enlightened persons who shared his opinion. In a twinkling he shot up, as it were, into the air like a rocket, and became popular, beyond his most sanguine expectations. The name of the first Church-rate martyr went the round of every paper in the United Kingdom; and at length came out a lithographed likeness of his odious face, with his precious autograph appended, so—"Thomas Tag-rag, Church-Rate martyr." Subscriptions were entered into on his behalf; and as they were paid into his hands from time to time, he kept quietly increasing his purchases of linen drapery and enlarging his business, in a most decisive and satisfactory manner. Nothing could exceed the accounts brought in to the poor martyr of the extent to which his custom was increasing; for in each window of his shop hung a copy of his portrait, attracting the eye of every passenger. But he was not the only person who rejoiced in this state of things; there being others who had a deep stake in his success, and whom he had not at first adverted to, viz., his assignees—who were watching his movements with lively interest. He was suddenly struck dumb with dismay when he heard of this unexpected issue of the affair; and began to fear that he had missed his providential way. His assignees, however, seemed to think that they had got into *theirs*—and enlarged the premises, and greatly increased the stock, profiting by the continually augmenting popularity of Tag-rag. From the moment of his making this dismal discovery, his ardour in the Great Cause wonderfully declined; and he would have jumped at any decent excuse for getting out of the thing altogether. And, indeed, when he came to think of it—where was the difficulty? He had fought a good fight—he had maintained a great principle—he had borne the heat and burden of the day. But while the martyr was thus musing within himself, powerful forces were coming into the field to his succour—viz., the Society for the Promotion of Civil and Religious Discord; who having caused all the proceedings against Tag-rag to be laid before an ambitious little Radical barrister, he discovered a fatal flaw in them—viz., that in the *Significavit*, the word "Bishop" was spelled "*Bisop*" (i.e., without the "h.") The point was argued with prodigious pertinacity, and incredible ingenuity, by four counsel on each side; each party vehemently

declaring that if he failed, the laws of England would be shaken to their very foundation, which of course not a little agitated the court. After great deliberation, the objection, "being in favour of liberty," was held to prevail; all the proceedings were quashed; and Mr. Tag-rag consequently declared entitled to his discharge. On this he was invited to a grand tea-party by the leading friends of the voluntary principle, given in Hackney Fields, where amidst a concourse of at least a hundred souls (including women and children), Tag-rag (inwardly shuddering, however, at the thought) avowed himself ready to go again to the stake, "if Providence should require it." That seemed not, however, likely to be the case; for the churchwardens, having already had to pay some £730 odd in the shape of costs, resolved never to meddle with him any more. He succeeded in prevailing on his assignees to take him into the shop, in order to carry on the business upon their account, and as their servant—for which they allowed him two pounds a-week. Out of this, however, he was soon after compelled by the parish authorities to allow twelve shillings a-week to Mrs. Tag-rag; and on making her the first payment, he spit in the poor woman's face! Doctor Johnson used to say that *patriotism* was the last refuge of a scoundrel. Now-a-days, however, it is *Church-rate Martyrdom*; and Tag-rag has had many imitators.

I must not, however, conclude this part of my long history, without adverting to what befell the surviving partners of Mr. Gammon, namely, Messrs. Quirk and Snap. The former had horrible misgivings as to the true cause of Mr. Gammon's death—having a strange inward persuasion that he had destroyed himself. When he heard, very suddenly, from the laundress of Mr. Gammon's death he was seized with a fit of trembling that lasted for several days. He dared not attend the funeral—orgo to Mr. Gammon's chambers while his corpse lay there. Mr. Snap, however, had younger and firmer nerves; and resolved to gratify his natural and very delicate curiosity, by seeing how Mr. Gammon looked in his coffin. The day after the enlightened coroner's inquest had been held, therefore, he went to the chambers for that purpose, and was shown by the sobbing laundress into the silent and gloomy bed-room where the remains of Mr. Gammon lay awaiting burial. The coffin lay on tressels near the window, which of course was darkened; and Mr. Snap, having taken off his hat, removed the coffin-lid and the face-cloth, and *there* was the cold stern countenance of Mr. Gammon before him! In spite of himself, Mr. Snap trembled as he looked, and for a moment doubted whether, in gazing at the *yellow effigy of him that was*, he was really looking at the late Mr. Gammon; so fixed, so rigid, were the features—so contracted of their proportions, and disfigured by the close-fitting frilled cap. What determination was yet visible in the compressed lips! The once keen and flashing eyes of Mr. Gammon were now hid for ever beneath the heavy and clammy eyelids; and the ample brow was no longer furrowed by the workings of the active and powerful spirit which had "jumped the world to come!" Mr. Snap gazed for several minutes in silence, and his heart beat a little quicker than usual.

"Oh, sir!" sobbed the laundress at length, as she too advanced to look again at the countenance of her deceased master, and from which she seldom took her eyes long together when alone—"he was the kindest and best of men! He was indeed!" Mr. Snap said nothing, but presently took hold of the cold, thin, stiff fingers of Mr. Gammon's right hand, squeezed them gently, and replaced the hand in its former position.

"I hope he's happy, dear soul!" cried the laundress, gazing at him through her tears. "Yes, of course he is—no doubt," replied Mr. Snap in a somewhat lower tone of voice than he had spoken in before, and slowly returned to the sitting-room, whither the laundress followed him as soon as she replaced the face-cloth and coffin-lid.

"Got a drop of brandy in the room, Mrs. Brown?" he inquired, and passed his hand across his face, which had grown very pale. She gave him what he asked for; he drank it, and sighed. "Devilish ugly look that cap gives him—eh, Mrs. Brown? Hardly knew him." "Ay, poor soul; but it don't much signify how the *face* looks if the heart's all right. He was always so kind to me; I shall never get another master like him!" "Died *very* suddenly, Mrs. Brown; didn't he?" "Ay, he did, sir! His troubles broke his heart!" "He'd quite enough of them to do so!" replied Snap significantly, and took his departure. He was one of the few who attended the funeral, and the day on which it took place was the gloomiest he had ever known.

Mr. Gammon being gone, old Mr. Quirk seemed to have quite lost the use of his head, and could attend to nothing. As for "the matters in the affidavits," which he had been ordered by the Court of King's Bench to answer, it was impossible to do so except by acknowledging the facts they stated to be true; and he was, in the ensuing term, struck off the roll of attorneys, and ceased to be any longer a "gentleman, one of the attorneys of our lord the king, before the king himself." In short he was completely broken up. He was quickly compelled to part with Alibi House—in fact, with all his property; and very nearly escaped being thrown into a prison, there to end his days. During the last week of his stay at Alibi House, while all his effects were being sold, he was observed to sit down for hours together before a certain picture covered with black crape; and once or twice he lifted up the crape, and gazed with a horrid look at the object before him, as if he was meditating something very mysterious and dismal. Nothing, however, happened. If he had ever wished to hang himself, he never could succeed in screwing his courage up to the sticking-place. He prevailed on a friend to buy in for him that particular picture; and it was almost the only article that he took with him to the small lodgings to which he removed with his daughter, on the sale of Alibi House. As for poor Miss Quirk, I pity her from my soul; for, though rather a weak girl, she was perfectly good-natured; and the reader will probably join in my indignation against Mr. Toady Hug, when he hears that that gentleman, on seeing the unfortunate turn which affairs took with Miss Quirk, at the very moment when he ought to have clung closest to the poor girl, deserted her, after having been engaged to be married to her ever since the period of her having been disappointed in the affections of Mr. Titmouse. It was, however, the business of the firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, that he had desired to marry; and finding that it no longer existed, he considered himself justified in rescinding the contract, on the ground of a failure of consideration. Snap, hearing of this, instantly tendered his own "heart" in lieu of that of Mr. Hug—and was accepted. He kept this very quiet, however, till the fate of the action for a breach of promise of marriage, which he persuaded Miss Quirk to allow him to bring in her name against Mr. Hug, should have been decided—as it soon was; for I should have mentioned that no attempt had been made by any one to strike Snap off the rolls. He retained a Mr. Heartbreak, a most eloquent counsel in such cases: and as Mr. Toady Hug defended himself in what he imagined to be a very splendid speech, the jury immediately found a verdict against him of five hundred pounds—a little fortune for Miss Quirk, if Hug could have paid it. But the fact was, that he could *not*; and after a long negotiation between Snap and him, it was settled that there should be a sort of secret partnership between them; and that Hug should work out the damages, by doing Mr. Snap's business for a quarter only of the proper fees—the full fee, however, for appearance's sake, was to be marked on his brief. Shortly after this Snap got married, and took a little house in Saffron Hill, only two doors from the old office; and, as he had always anxiously cultivated the acquaintance of the leading thieves, he soon got into a very respectable connection. A year afterwards, Mrs. Snap

made him the happy father of a quaint-looking little child ; which, being . boy, his father out of reverence for his deceased friend and partner, Mr. Gammon, caused it to be christened by the name of "*Oily Snap*." Old Mr. Quirk lingered on for about a couple of years longer, most inconveniently to Snap when he died of a broken heart ; and as Snap assisted in depositing the reverend remains of his father-in-law in St. Andrew's churchyard, he could not help thinking within himself what a *horrid* bore it would be were the old gentleman to get up again, and come back and establish himself for another couple of years in their little back parlour !

Let us now, however, turn to characters worthier of our notice, of our sympathy, and our congratulation.

Two or three days after the assembling of the new parliament, Lord Drelin-court was introduced by two of his brother barons (one of whom was Lord De la Zouch), with the usual formalities, into the House of Lords. As he stood at the table while being sworn in, tranquil and dignified, there was such an expression of noble simplicity and *goodness* in his features—which had not even then, however, entirely lost the traces of the anxiety and suffering through which he had passed—as touched me to the very soul, and I fervently wished him health and long life to enjoy his new honours. He looked quite commanding in his ample ermine and scarlet robes ; and having taken the pen which was tendered him, and inscribed on the roll the name "*Drelin-court*"—(that of very nearly the most ancient barony in England)—and formally taken his seat on the barons' bench, and received the congratulations of his brother peers who came crowding around him—he stepped up to the woolsack, and grasped with silent energy the hand of the new Lord Chancellor, Lord Wolstenholme, who, dignified and commanding in his appearance and bearing, and familiar with his position as if he had occupied it for more years than he had *days*, welcomed the newly-introduced peer with infinite warmth and cordiality. This was Sir Charles Wolstenholme, the Attorney-General of a few short months before, and he to whose masterly ability and unwavering friendship Lord Drelin-court was mainly, if not indeed altogether, indebted for the position which he then occupied. They sat talking together for some time ; and the Chancellor happening to mention the ludicrous and yet intolerable pressure to which he was subject for everything he had to give away—particularly in the *livings* which fell to his disposal—he instanced a small one in Devonshire of four hundred a-year, of which he had had notice only two hours before coming to the House, since which time he had had a dozen applications for it from peers present. "Now, as a small *memento* of to-day, Drelin-court," said he, with a smile, "can you give me the name of any man that in your judgment wants, and would suit, such a living ?"

"Oh, my dear Lord Chancellor !" replied Lord Drelin-court, with eager delight, "I know a man—a very able, exemplary, *starving* friend of mine, Mr. Neville—the Rev. Ralph Neville. He will do honour to your choice !" "Tis his !" replied the Chancellor ; "give me his name and address—he shall have it offered him this very evening, if he lives in town."

Lord Drelin-court, overjoyed, wrote down Mr. Neville's name and address, and gave it to the Chancellor ; and having reminded him that their dinner hour was seven precisely that day (the Chancellor had been for some days engaged to dinner with him), Lord Drelin-court somewhat hastily quitted the House, resolved to be himself the first bearer to poor Mr. Neville of the delightful intelligence of his promotion. His carriage, with Lady Drelin-court and Miss Aubrey in it, had been standing for some time near the House, awaiting his return, in order to drive once or twice round the Park before dinner ; but you may guess the kind of transport with which they heard him give directions for their being driven to St. George's in the East, and the object of his errand.

When Lord Drelincourt's equipage—simple and elegant, and with the coronet painted on the panels so small as not to *challenge* the observation of every passenger—drew up opposite the humble lodgings of Mr. Neville, he and his little sick wife were sitting at tea, for which purpose he had a few minutes before propped her up upon the sofa, on which she was obliged to recline during the greater part of each day. Prettily flustered were both of them on seeing the carriage roll up, the steps let down, and hearing Lord Drelincourt, followed quickly by Lady Drelincourt and Miss Aubrey (it was the first time, that they had seen the former two except as Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey), knock at the door. Oh, how sweet was the office of communicating such intelligence as that which they brought to Mr. and Mrs. Neville! He, on hearing it, turned immediately, and as it were instinctively, to his pale suffering wife, with full eye and quivering lip—and she returned the look he gave her. Well he knew that the true source of her frail health was their privation and miserably straitened circumstances, and that the intelligence which they had just received would, as it were, pour into the broken heart the oil of gladness and of health. There was not the slightest change in the deportment of his distinguished visitors; but his own was, in spite of all he could do to the contrary, consciously subdued, and a little embarrassed. What thankfulness was in his heart! How was the great, barren, frowning world around him turned into a smiling paradise! To all parties, that was, indeed, an occasion of the outgoing of hearts towards each other; and Lord and Lady Drelincourt, before leaving, had insisted on seeing Mr. and Mrs. Neville at dinner in Dover Street, before they left town, as they expected would shortly be the case.

As I have already intimated, Lord Drelincourt had that evening a select dinner party; and there was a little incident connected with it, which will also, I think, serve to set forth the considerate good-nature of Lord Drelincourt. His guests consisted of the Lord Chancellor and Lady Wolstenholme, Lord and Lady De la Zouch, Mr. Delamere, three or four other friends, Mr. Runnington, and a Mr. Staveley, a former fellow pupil of Lord Drelincourt's, and whom he had left still studying closely in the chambers of Mr. Mansfield. Lord Drelincourt had always entertained a very friendly feeling towards Mr. Staveley, who was a young man of very strong understanding, great industry, sound principle, and perfect frankness and simplicity of character. Mr. Aubrey had from the first observed the depression of spirits to which his companion was subject, and which, in the course of their subsequent unreserved communications with each other, he had discovered to be occasioned by the sad precariousness of his pecuniary circumstances, and the absence of all prospect or apparent chance of professional connection. It seemed that the relative by whose liberality he had been enabled to enter himself a student at Lincoln's Inn, and become a pupil of Mr. Mansfield's, had died suddenly, leaving his nephew almost totally destitute. Was it not likely that he was just such a person as would excite the yearning sympathies now of his ennobled fellow-student? Indeed it was so; and the reason of Lord Drelincourt's asking him to dinner on the present occasion was to give him a personal introduction to two individuals capable of being hereafter of vast service to any candidate (possessed of industry, energy, and talent) for professional business and distinction; namely, Mr. Runnington, as a solicitor of first-rate professional eminence, great personal respectability, and amiability of character—and the Lord Chancellor; with both of whom, as may easily be believed, Lord Drelincourt had great personal influence. Mr. Staveley was the first guest that arrived, and he found Lord Drelincourt alone in the drawing-room. His lordship seized the opportunity of conversing with his friend unrestrainedly upon the topics above alluded to, and of assuring him that he might always rely on any good offices which it might be in his lordship's power to perform for

him. "As for the want of a connection, I can only say that I knew but one attorney and solicitor in all London—my own—a Mr. Runnington (who dines with me to-day); but, had I known none, I should not have been disheartened, so long as I had health of body and mind, and the means of pursuing my studies——" Here Lord Drelincourt's quick ear caught a faint and half-suppressed sigh, uttered by his companion.—"I did my best when engaged in the study of the law, and am sure that I shall never have occasion to regret it; and I frankly tell you, Staveley, I was as poor as a church mouse the whole time—over head and ears in debt; and, but for the kindness of this very Mr. Runnington, who lent me three hundred pounds, I never could have entered Mr. Mansfield's chambers, or formed your acquaintance."—While saying this, Lord Drelincourt was looking very keenly indeed at his companion.—"The law," continued his lordship, "is a noble profession! I should have become an enthusiast in it had I continued to devote myself to its study and practice;—by the way, will you accept, as a little *memento* of our friendship—which I trust you will not permit to be broken off, Staveley—my few law-books? Of course I have no further occasion for those which relate to the more practical——"

Here one of the doors opened, and Lady Drelincourt and Miss Aubrey entered, looking each of them exceedingly lovely, and receiving Mr. Staveley with a charming cordiality and courtesy, for they had often heard Lord Drelincourt mention his name. The other guests then made their appearance in quick succession; and Lord Drelincourt made a point of introducing Mr. Staveley, in very flattering terms, to the Chancellor, who received him with great urbanity, as indeed did Mr. Runnington. 'Twas truly a delightful dinner party—all were in high spirits. As for the Lord Chancellor, he took an opportunity during the evening of pressing on Lord Drelincourt the acceptance of an important office under the new government—one which they were exceedingly anxious to have satisfactorily filled, and to which would be annexed a seat in the cabinet. Lord Drelincourt, however, firmly declined the brilliant offer, on the plea of the repose which he felt to be requisite, both for his family and himself, and also the attention due to his private affairs, to which it would be necessary to devote his personal superintendence for some time to come. But to return for a moment to Mr. Staveley. Soon after he had sat down to breakfast the next morning, a servant of Lord Drelincourt's brought to his chambers a small parcel, which, in fact, consisted of the books of which his lordship had begged his acceptance overnight. With what peculiar interest did Mr. Staveley glance over them, finding in every page the slight pencil marks, evidencing the careful reading of Lord Drelincourt! In laying down the first book which he had opened, something fell from it upon the floor, which, on his picking it up, proved to be a letter addressed to himself, in the handwriting of Lord Drelincourt. On opening it, what were his feelings on seeing it contain an enclosure of a draft on his lordship's banker for the sum of £300, which he begged Mr. Staveley to accept as a loan, to be repaid whenever and however he might think fit; and in terms of the most earnest delicacy, reminding him of the circumstance which his lordship had named overnight—namely, his own acceptance of a similar sum from Mr. Runnington. Mr. Staveley coloured under a conflict of emotions, which subsided quickly into one strong and deep feeling of gratitude towards his truly noble and generous friend; and that morning he wrote a letter, acknowledging in fitting terms the munificent act of Lord Drelincourt, and enclosing his note of hand for the amount; both of which, however, on his receiving them, Lord Drelincourt, with a good-natured smile, put into the fire.

At length every arrangement had been made in London for their quitting it, and at Yatton for their arrival. The last article of furniture, a magnificent pianc for Lady Drelincourt, had gone down a fortnight before. Lord and Lady De la

Zouch, together with Mr. Delamere, had been at Fotheringham for some time : and the accounts they gave in their letters of the scene which might be expected on the memorable occasion of Lord Drelincourt's taking possession of Yatton, drew them all into a flutter of excitement. From Mr. Delamere's accounts it would seem as if the day of their arrival was to be a sort of jubilee. He himself had been to and fro twenty times between Yatton and Fotheringham ; an entire unanimity of feeling existed, it seemed, with reference to all the leading arrangements, between himself, Mr. Griffiths, Dr. Tatham, Lord and Lady De Zouch, and the Earl and Countess of Oldacre, whom it had been deemed expedient to take into their confidence upon the occasion ; and a difficult negotiation concerning a certain fine military band, belonging to a regiment stationed only eleven miles off, had been brought to a most satisfactory termination ! Dr. Tatham wrote letters to them, especially to Miss Aubrey, almost every day, and, in fact, they all began to imagine themselves already at Yatton, and in the midst of the delicious bustle that was going on there.

At length the long-expected day for their setting off arrived—the 5th day of May, 18—. About ten o'clock in the forenoon might have been seen standing opposite Lord Drelincourt's door in Dover Street, two roomy travelling carriages and four. Several newly-engaged servants had gone down two or three days before, in charge of a large van full of luggage ; and in the first carriage were going only Lord and Lady Drelincourt and Miss Aubrey, his lordship's valet and Lady Drelincourt's maid sitting in the rumble behind ; while the second carriage was occupied by little Charles and Agnes, and their attendants, together with Harriet, Miss Aubrey's faithful and pretty little maid. Everything being at length ready, the word was given, crack went the whips, and away they rolled on their memorable and exciting journey. There was an evident air of expectation and interest along the road, for a long while before they approached Yatton ; for in fact it was generally known that Lord Drelincourt, who, it was believed, had passed through a series of romantic adventures, was going down to take possession of the ancient family estate in Yorkshire. At length they reached the last posting-house, which was within twelve miles of Yatton, and where there were manifest symptoms of preparation and excitement. Eight very fine horses were brought out in a twinkling, and the harness appeared both new and gay. Mrs. Spruce, the landlady, together with her two daughters, all of them dressed with unusual smartness, stood at the inn door, curtsying repeatedly : and on Lady Drelincourt and Kate seeing them, they beckoned them to the carriage door, and inquired after their health, with such a kindness and interest in their manner as almost brought tears into their eyes.

"So you have not forgotten us, Mrs. Spruce ?" asked Lord Drelincourt with a gay smile, as they handed a couple of glasses of water into the carriage, at the request of Lady Drelincourt and Kate, who were evidently getting very nervous with their proximity to Yatton, and the exciting scenes which there awaited them.

"Oh, my lord, forgotten, your lordship ! No, my ladies, not for one minute since the dismal day you all went—my lord ! There's *such* a stir, my ladies, along the road—you'll see it all when you get a mile further on !—Of course, your lordship and your ladyships know what's going to be done at the Hall—"

"Ah, ah ! so I hear ! Well—good-day, Mrs. Spruce !" cried Lord Drelincourt, as they had dashed off in their last stage, and at a court, and the next moment they had dashed off in their last stage, and at a thundering pace to be sure. It was nearly twelve o'clock at noon, and the day was bright and beautiful—and there was a fresh and exhilarating breeze stirring that oft came laden with the rich scents of summer fields.

"Oh Agnes ! oh Kate ! what a contrast is this to the day on which our horses' heads, two years ago, were turned the other way !" exclaimed Lord Drelincourt ; but received only a faint reply, for his companions were getting

excited and restless with the rapidly increasing evidences of excitement on the road. As they advanced they overtook vehicles of every description, all containing people in gay holiday trim, and all with their horses' heads turned one way; viz., towards the great centre of attraction, Yatton. At length the increasing number of carriages, chaises, cars, gigs, vans, carts, waggons—many of them decked with ribands, flowers, and laurel boughs—compelled them to slacken their speed, and gave them fuller opportunities of witnessing the joyful enthusiasm with which their approach was greeted. Already they heard, or imagined they heard, from the direction of Yatton, the sounds of voices and music.

"I'm sure, Charles, I shall cry like a child"—quoth Kate, her eyes suddenly filling with tears; and such was the case also with Lady Drelincourt. "And what, Kate, if you do?" cried her brother, joyfully, kissing and embracing them affectionately.

"Charles! Charles!—I declare there's old Granny Grimston—it is indeed!" cried Kate eagerly, as they passed an old-fashioned market-cart, in which sat, sure enough, the good creature Miss Aubrey had mentioned, beside her daughter, to whom Kate waved her hand repeatedly—for the former had been an old pensioner of the late Mrs. Aubrey's.

Oh, what a sight burst upon them when they came to the turning of the road which brought them full in view of Yatton—the village and the Hall! They came, too, to a dead stand-still—'twas impossible to get on for some time, for they seemed to have got suddenly into the middle of some great fair! What a shout rent the air! Boughs of laurel were waving in all directions, with wreaths and ribands! Beautiful nosegays were flung in through the carriage windows by men, women, and even children, all dressed in their best and gayest attire! Here was formed an equestrian procession that was to precede them into Yatton, consisting of some hundred stout Yorkshire yeomen, chiefly tenants of Lord Drelincourt and his neighbours. Louder and louder came the shouts of welcome from all quarters, before and behind, intermingled at length, as they entered the village, with the clash and clangour of cymbals, the thundering of drums, the sounds of trumpets, trombones, clarionets, and shrill inspiring fifes. 'Twas really most exciting, and Lady Drelincourt and Kate were already amply fulfilling their own predictions. Their carriage suddenly stopped for some moments; and a louder shout than had yet been heard burst around them, while the fine military band approached playing "*Rule Britannia!*" followed by a procession of at least two hundred horsemen, headed by Delamere, and all wearing his bright blue election colours! He thrust his hand into the carriage, and grasping those of each of them, again rode off. Here an attempt was made to take the horses out of Lord Drelincourt's carriage, which he peremptorily forbade, acknowledging, however, the affectionate enthusiasm which prompted the proposal, by repeatedly bowing in all directions as they passed down the village. Flags and branches of laurel hung from almost every window, and the crowd had become so great as to prevent them frequently from moving on for more than a minute or two together. At length they saw the dear old church, with its long, thin, grey spire—no doubt its little bells were ringing as loudly as they could be rung, but they could not be heard; for the band at that moment, when within a few yards of the park gates, struck up in fine style the inspiring air of "*The King shall hae his ain again!*" A great number of carriages were drawn up on each side of the entrance, and the antique iron gates and stone pillars were covered with wreaths of flowers and branches of laurel. Within the gates, on each side, upon forms and stools, sat about a dozen of the oldest tenants on the estate, male and female, who, on the approach of Lord Drelincourt, lifted up their hands feebly towards heaven, while tears ran down their eyes, and they implored a blessing on those who were

re-entering their own, after so long and cruel a separation from it. But here the eager eyes of the travellers lit upon an object infinitely more interesting than any they had yet seen—'twas the venerable figure of Dr. Tatham, who, with his hat off, stood with his hand and face elevated momentarily towards heaven, imploring a blessing upon those who were entering. Lord Drelincourt instantly called for the carriage door to be opened, and, within a moment or two's time, he had grasped the little Doctor's hands in his own; and Lady Drelincourt and Kate, having also hastily alighted, had thrown their arms around him, and kissed him with the feelings of two daughters towards a fond and venerated father. The little Doctor was quite overcome, and could scarcely say a word. At this point came up Mr. Delamere, who had dismounted at the gate, and placing Kate's arm hastily, and with a proud and triumphant air, within his own, while Lady Drelincourt was supported between her husband and Dr. Tatham, the two children following, with their attendants, immediately behind—in this manner they approached the Hall, each side of the avenue being lined with the gaily-dressed gentry of the neighbourhood, collected from far and wide. When they reached the fine old gateway, there shot up suddenly into the air, upon a flag-staff planted upon the centre of the turret, a crimson banner, while the band within the court-yard struck up the spirit-stirring air, one which no Englishman can listen to without excitement—"See the Conquering Hero comes!" The moment that they had passed under the old gateway, what a gay and brilliant scene presented itself! Upon the steps fronting the door, and indeed all around, stood the most distinguished persons in the county, ready to greet the new-comers. There was the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, the High Sheriff, two of the county members—Catholics and Protestants—high Tories and high Whigs—there they were—the high-born, the beautiful—the gifted, the good—all crowding with eager and enthusiastic welcome around those who were thus returning to their own, after so infamous an exclusion. To Lady Drelincourt, to Miss Aubrey, to Lord Drelincourt himself, amidst the overpowering excitement of the moment, it appeared as though they were in a vivid and dazzling dream. Lady De la Zouch, and one or two others of their considerate friends, observing the excitement under which Lady Drelincourt and Miss Aubrey were labouring, succeeded in withdrawing them for a while from the tumultuous and splendid scene into their chambers.

A cold collation was spread in the hall for the immediate friends and guests of Lord Drelincourt, while an immense entertainment of a more substantial description, was prepared under an awning, upon the beautiful terrace at the back of the Hall, for about three hundred people, consisting principally of the tenantry, their families and friends. (Half-a-dozen feasts were going on in the village, for those who were necessarily excluded from the terrace tables.) The substantial business of the day—viz., feasting—was to commence, both for gentle and simple, at three o'clock, shortly before which period Lady Drelincourt and Miss Aubrey appeared in the drawing-room, and then in the hall, infinitely the better for their refreshing toilets. 'Tis true that their eyes looked somewhat impaired by the excessive emotions occasioned by the events of the day—for they had both been several times, during their brief absence, on the verge of hysterics; yet for all that they looked a pair of as lovely women as dear Old England, rich in delicate beauty as it is, could produce. They both wore plain white muslin dresses, with small blue rosettes, which Lady De la Zouch had intimated would give a certain person infinite gratification—meaning the new member for the borough; for his colours were blue—whereof there was a modest glimpse in his own surtout. Lord Drelincourt also appeared greatly the better for his visit to his dressing-room, and was in the highest possible spirits—as well he might be, amidst a scene so glorious as that around him. At length, it being announced that all was in readiness, before sitting down to their own

banquet, Lord Drelincourt, with Lady Drelincourt on one arm and his sister on the other, and followed by Dr. Tatham, and Mr. Runnington, and almost all his guests, passed along under the old archway that led over the bridge to the terrace, in order that the Doctor might say grace before the feast began : and the instant that Lord and Lady Drelincourt and Miss Aubrey made their appearance, the shouting and clapping of hands, and waving of handkerchiefs, that ensued, defies description, completely overpowering Lady Drelincourt and Kate, and somewhat disturbing the equanimity of Lord Drelincourt himself. 'Twas several minutes before the least cessation occurred. At length, however, Mr. Griffiths, the steward, who was to preside on the occasion, succeeded in directing attention to Dr. Tatham, who stood uncovered ready to say grace, which he did as soon as there was a decent approach to silence ; he, and those who had accompanied him, then returning to the Hall. What a prodigious onslaught was instantly made on the innumerable good things which were heaped upon those hospitable tables. There was ale *ad libitum* ; and, in addition to that, a bottle of port and of sherry to each mess of four, which latter viands, however, were generally reserved for the business that was to take place after the substantial part of the feast had been discussed.

About four o'clock intimation was given to the vast party upon the terrace, that Lord Drelincourt, accompanied by his guests, would come and take their seats for a short time at the head of the tables—his lordship occupying the place of Mr. Griffiths. After a great bustle, the requisite space was obtained at the head of the table ; and Dr. Tatham led in Lady Drelincourt, and Mr. Delamere, Kate ; followed by Lord Drelincourt and all his guests—their arrival being greeted in the same enthusiastic manner as before. After they had selected their places, Dr. Tatham returned thanks amidst a sudden and decorous silence. Lord Drelincourt sat at the head of the table, with Lady Drelincourt on one side and his sister upon the other, both looking exceedingly animated and beautiful. Beside Kate sat Mr. Delamere, his eye watching her every look and motion ; and beside Lady Drelincourt sat Dr. Tatham, looking as happy and as proud as it was possible for him to look. After sitting for some minutes conversing with those immediately around him, Lord Drelincourt slowly poured out a glass of wine, his hand slightly trembling ; and while Lady Drelincourt and Kate leaned down their heads, and hid their faces, he rose amidst respectful and anxious silence. His voice was at all times clear and melodious, his enunciation distinct and deliberate ; so that every word he uttered could be heard by all present. There were grace and dignity in his countenance and gestures ; and you felt, as you looked and listened to him, that he was speaking from his heart. Thus he began :—

“ Oh, my friends ! what a happy moment is this to me and mine ! What thanks do I not owe to God for His great goodness, in bringing us again together in our former relations of mutual and uninterrupted respect and affection ! You must not, however, expect me to say much now, for I cannot, because my heart is so full of love and respect to those whom I see around me, and of gratitude to God. May He, my dear friends, who is now beholding us and marking the thoughts of our hearts, bless and preserve you all, and enable me never to give you cause to regret having thus affectionately welcomed me back again to my home ! It pleased Him, my friends, that I, and those whom you see near me, and whom I so tenderly love, should be torn away suddenly, and for a long time, from all that our hearts held dear. The pangs it cost us—bear with me, my friends—the pangs it cost us”—here Lord Drelincourt could not go on for some moments. “ We have, since we left you all, gone through much affliction ; a little privation ; and some persecution. It was all, however, God’s ordering, and we have besought Him that we might at all times feel and know it to be so, in order that we might never be impatient or rebellious,

Ah, my friends! He is wiser and kinder in His dealings with us, than we are often able to see; and as for myself, I think I can say that I would not have lost the lessons which my recent sufferings have taught me, for a thousand times my present advantages.

"What has befallen me has satisfied me, and I hope you, too, of the slight hold we have of those advantages which we consider ourselves surest of. Who can tell, dear friends, what a day or an hour may bring forth? And I hope I have also learned one of the great lessons of life, better than I knew it before—that cheerful resignation to the will of God is the only source of fortitude! God loves the voice of praise that He hears from the desert! Never, dear friends, when we are in our deepest difficulties and troubles—never, NEVER let us despair! Thank God, I never did, or you would not perhaps have seen me here to-day. God overrules everything for the real good of those who faithfully obey Him: and in our own case, I can assure you, that the very things which we looked upon as the cruellest and hardest to bear of all that had happened to us, turned out to be the very means by which we have been restored to the happiness which we are now met to celebrate! See how good God has been to us! When I look around me, and see what I am permitted to enjoy, and know what I *deserve*, I tremble.

"You all know, of course, that it has pleased God to place us a little higher in point of mere worldly station than we were before; but I think you will find that it has made only this difference in us: namely, we are more sensible of the importance of the duties which we have to perform. 'Tis not, dear friends—I deeply feel—the mere coronet which confers true distinction, but *how it is worn*. I, of course have only succeeded by birth, and, in a manner, by accident, to that mark of distinction which the merit of some other person had won for him long ago. I trust I shall wear it with honour and humility, and that so will my son after me.

"And now, my dear friends, I must conclude. You see how much those who are sitting near me are affected." Lord Drelincourt glanced fondly but hastily at Lady Drelincourt and his sister, paused for some time, and then in a lower tone resumed, "You may remember, some of you at least, the evening before we left Yatton; what you then said to me"—here again he paused, and for some time. "I have never forgotten that evening; the thought of it has often been like balm poured into a broken heart.

"I have heard that since I left you all, things have gone very differently from the way they went in my time. Oh, dear friends, there shall be no more extortion—there shall be no more oppression, at Yatton! I can, I think, answer for myself; and I think my little son will not take after his father if—you shall see my children presently—God bless you, dear friends! You see that I have now and then been overcome while speaking; I know you will bear with me. Were you in my place, and to look upon those whom I now look upon, you also would be overcome. But let our tears now pass away! Rejoice, dear friends, for it is a day of rejoicing! Be merry! be happy! I now from my heart drink—we all drink, all your healths! Here are health, and peace, and prosperity to you all! God bless you all!"

Lord Drelincourt raised his glass to his lips and drank off the wine it contained, his hand visibly trembling the while. He then sat down, evidently much subdued; and as for Lady Drelincourt, Miss Aubrey, and Lady De la Zouch—nay, everybody present—they were deeply affected by the simple and affectionate address that had fallen from Lord Drelincourt, which was followed by a long silence, that was infinitely more expressive than the most vociferous responses. After a while, the band commenced playing, in a very beautiful manner, "Should auld acquaintance be forgot." There were heard several attempts, from different quarters, to join in the chorus, but they were very faint;

and Lord Drelincourt, perceiving the true state of the case, covered his face with his hands. Then, affectionately taking the hands of Kate and Lady Drelincourt, he whispered that all their past sufferings were surely that day richly recompensed; and fearing lest his presence and that of his distinguished guests might be a check upon the freedom of the great company before him, he rose, and bowing courteously to all around, and followed by those who had accompanied him, withdrew amidst vehement cheering. A few minutes afterwards, according to Lord Drelincourt's promise, little Charles and Agnes were led in amidst a thousand exclamations of fondness and admiration (they were really very beautiful children); and having had a little drop of wine poured into each of their cups, they drank timidly, as they were told, to the health of all present, and then skipped hastily back whence they had come.

I shall not detain the reader with the description which I had prepared of the opening of Kate's school on the morrow; though I think he would have liked to have been present. A prettier school there is not in England; and if anything could have increased Kate's love for him who had taken such pains to please her in the matter, it was Dr. Tatham's informing her, a morning or two afterwards, that Mr. Delamere had endowed her school with thirty pounds a year for ever. In proportion to Kate's sorrow on leaving her school upon the occasion of their all being driven from Yatton, it may easily be believed were her delight and gratitude for this its complete and more efficient restoration. The opening of that school by Doctor Tatham, in her presence, and also in that of Mr. Delamere, was doubtless an interesting ceremony, yet not to be compared, perhaps, with one that occurred a short month afterwards at Yatton, and in which the same three persons were principally concerned!—Here is a heavenly morning in June! and Kate lying trembling and with beating heart in that old-fashioned chamber of hers, in which she was first seen by the reader—or, at least, where he obtained a faint and dim vision of her.—'Tis very early, certainly; and as Kate hath passed a strange, restless night, she is at length closing her eyes in sleep; and as nothing is to be heard stirring, save yonder lark that is carrying his song higher and higher out of hearing, every moment, she will sleep for a while undisturbed.

* * * * *

—But *now*, rise, Kate! rise! It is your wedding morning! Early though it be, here are your fair bridesmaids seeking admittance, to deck you in your bridal robes! Sweet Kate, why turn so pale, and tremble so violently? It is truly a memorable day, one long looked forward to with a fluttering heart—a day of delicious agitation and embarrassment; but courage, Kate! courage! Cannot these three beautiful girls who, like the Graces, are arraying you, as becomes your loveliness, with all their innocent arts and archness, provoke one smile on your pale cheek? Weep, then, if such be your humour; for it is the overflowing of joy, and will relieve your heart!—But hasten! hasten! your lover is below, impatient to clasp you in his arms! The maids of the village have been up with the sun gathering sweet flowers to scatter on your way to the altar! Hark how merrily, merrily ring the bells of Yatton church!—Nearer and nearer comes the hour which cannot be delayed; and why, blushing and trembling maiden, should you dread its approach! Hark—carriage after carriage is coming crashing up to the Hall!—Now your maidens are placing on your beautiful brow the orange blossoms—mysterious emblems!—"The fruits of autumn and the flowers of spring"—and a long graceful veil shall conceal your blushes!—Now, at length, she descends and sinks into the arms of a fond and noble brother, whose heart is too full for speech, as is that of her sister! Shrink not, my beauteous Kate, from your lover who approaches you, see how tenderly and delicately! Is he not one whom a maiden may be proud of? See the troops of friends that are waiting to attend you, and do you honour! Everywhere

that the eye looks, are glistening gay wedding favours, emblems of innocence and joy. Come, Kate—your brother waits; you go with *him* to church, but you will come back with *another*! He that loves you as a father, the venerable minister of God, is awaiting your arrival! What a brilliant throng is in that little church!

Now her beautiful form is standing at the altar, beside her manly lover, and the solemn ceremony has commenced, which is to unite, with Heaven's awful sanction, these two young and happy and virtuous hearts!

'Tis done! Kate Aubrey! Kate Aubrey! where are you! She is no more—but, as Mrs. Delamere, is sitting blushing and sobbing beside her husband, he elate with pride and fondness, as they drive rapidly back to the Hall. In vain glances her eyes at the splendid banquet, as it shrinks also timidly from the glittering array of guests seated around it—and she soon retires with her maidens to prepare for her agitating journey! Well—they are gone! My pure and lovely Kate is gone! 'Tis hard to part with her! But blessings attend her! Blessings attend you both! You cannot forget dear *Yutton*, where all that is virtuous and noble will ever with open arms receive you!

And now, dear friends! farewell for many a day!
 If e'er we meet again, I cannot say.
 Together have we travell'd two long years,
 And mingled sometimes smiles, and sometimes tears!
 Now droops my weary hand, and swells my heart,—
 I fear, good friends! we must for ever part
 Forgive my many faults! and say of me,
 He hath meant well, who writ this history.

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